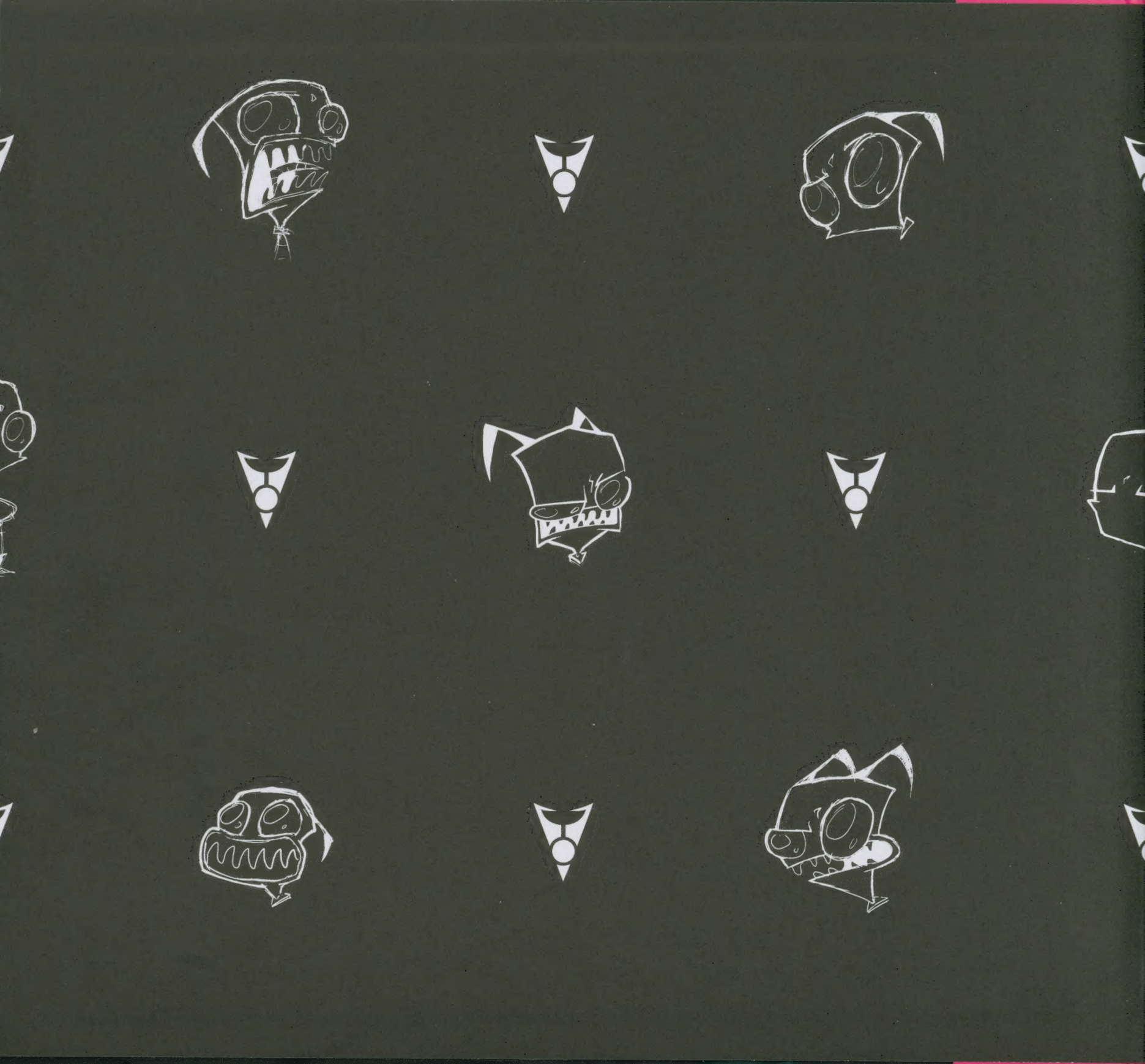
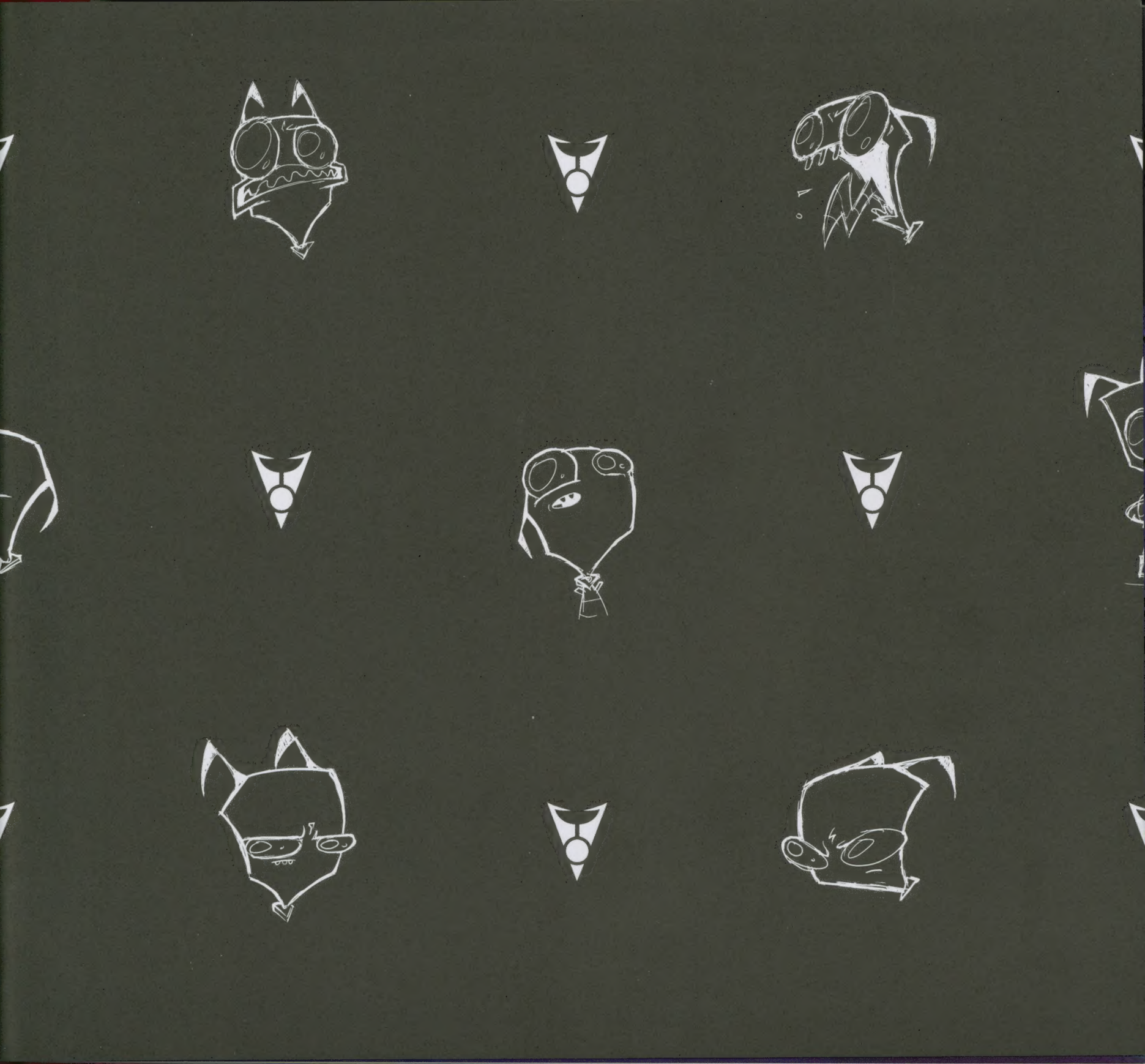
Foreword By
REBECCA
SUGAR

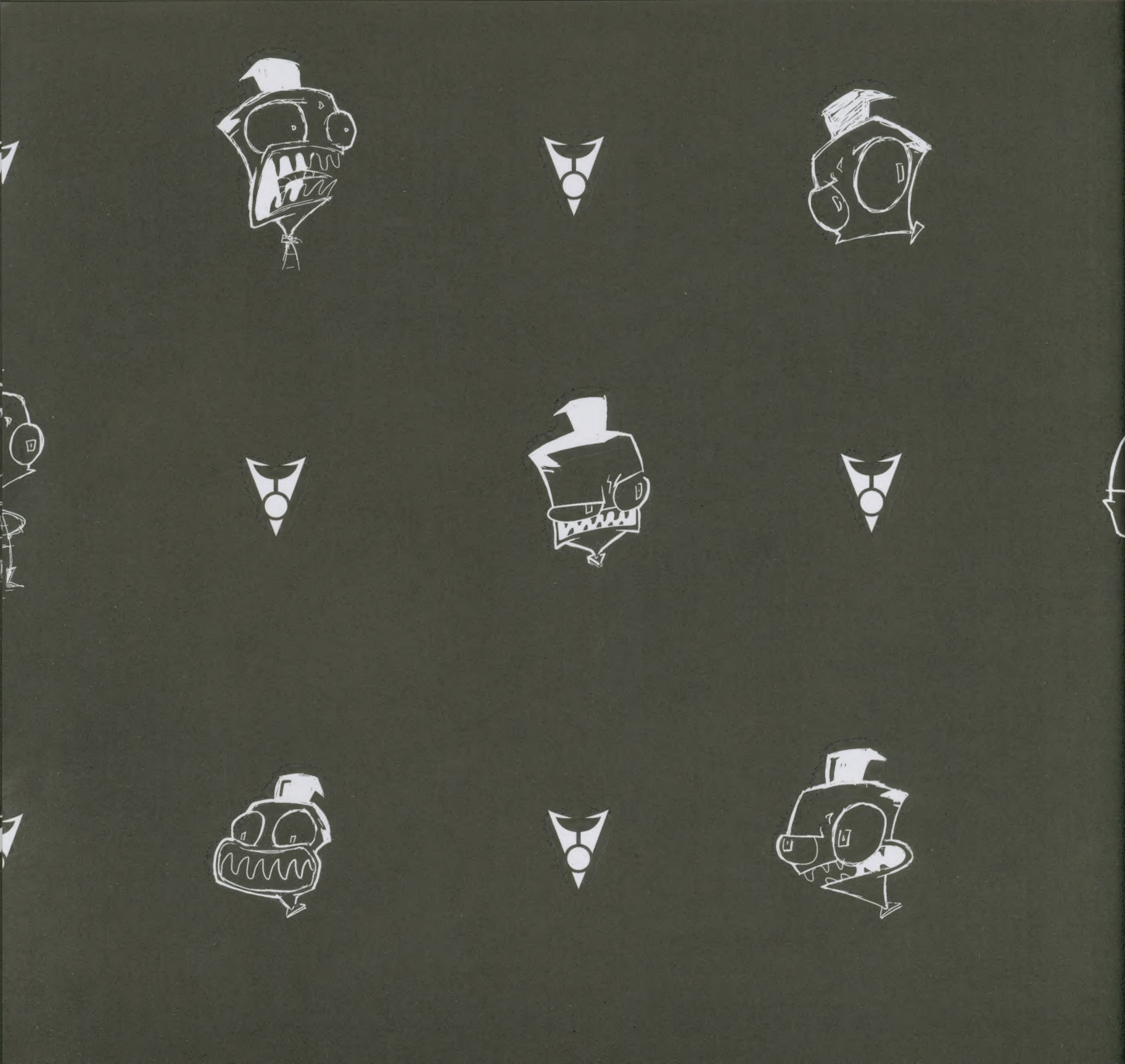
Written By
CHRIS
MCDONNELL

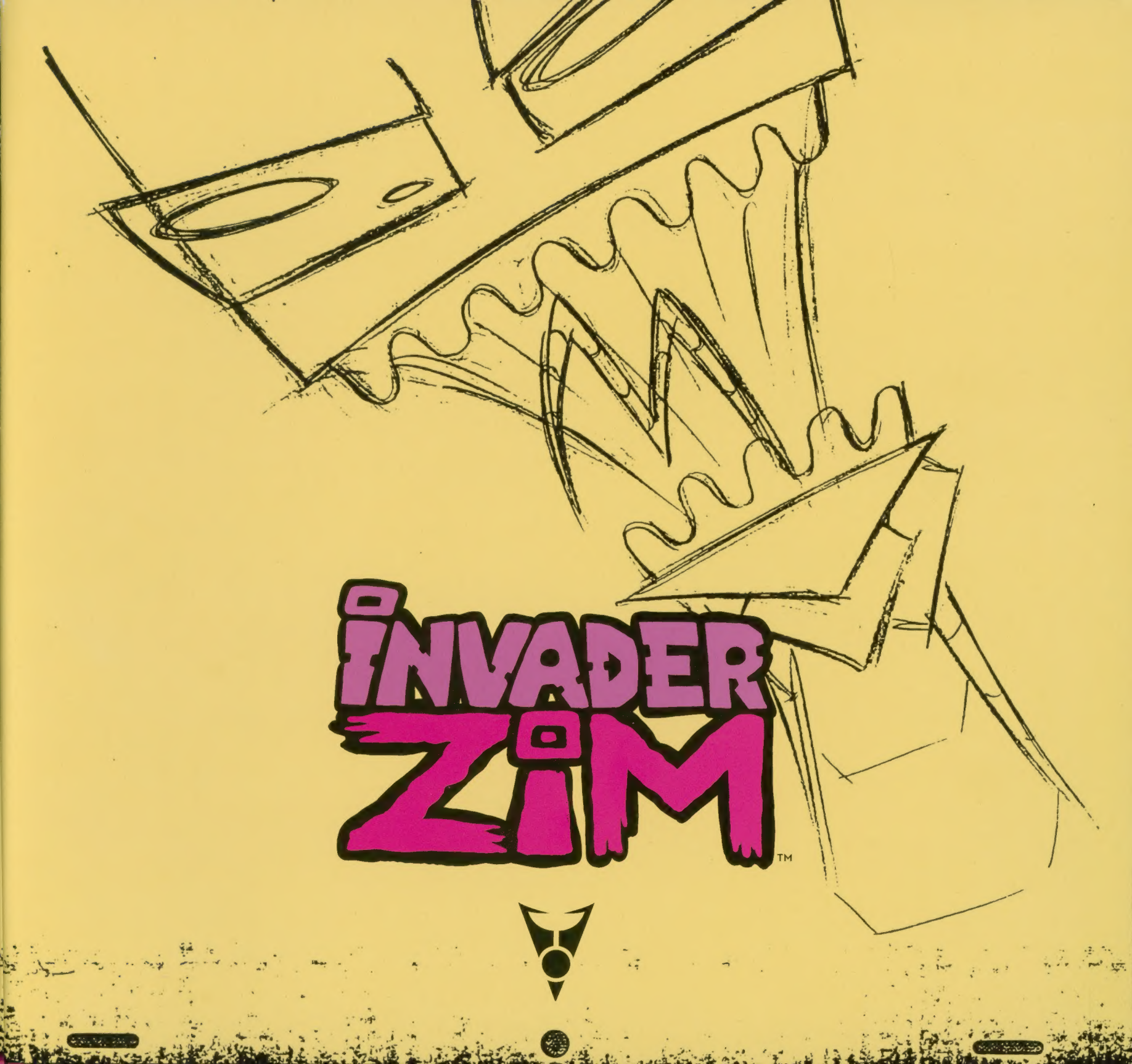
THE ART OF

INVADER ZIM

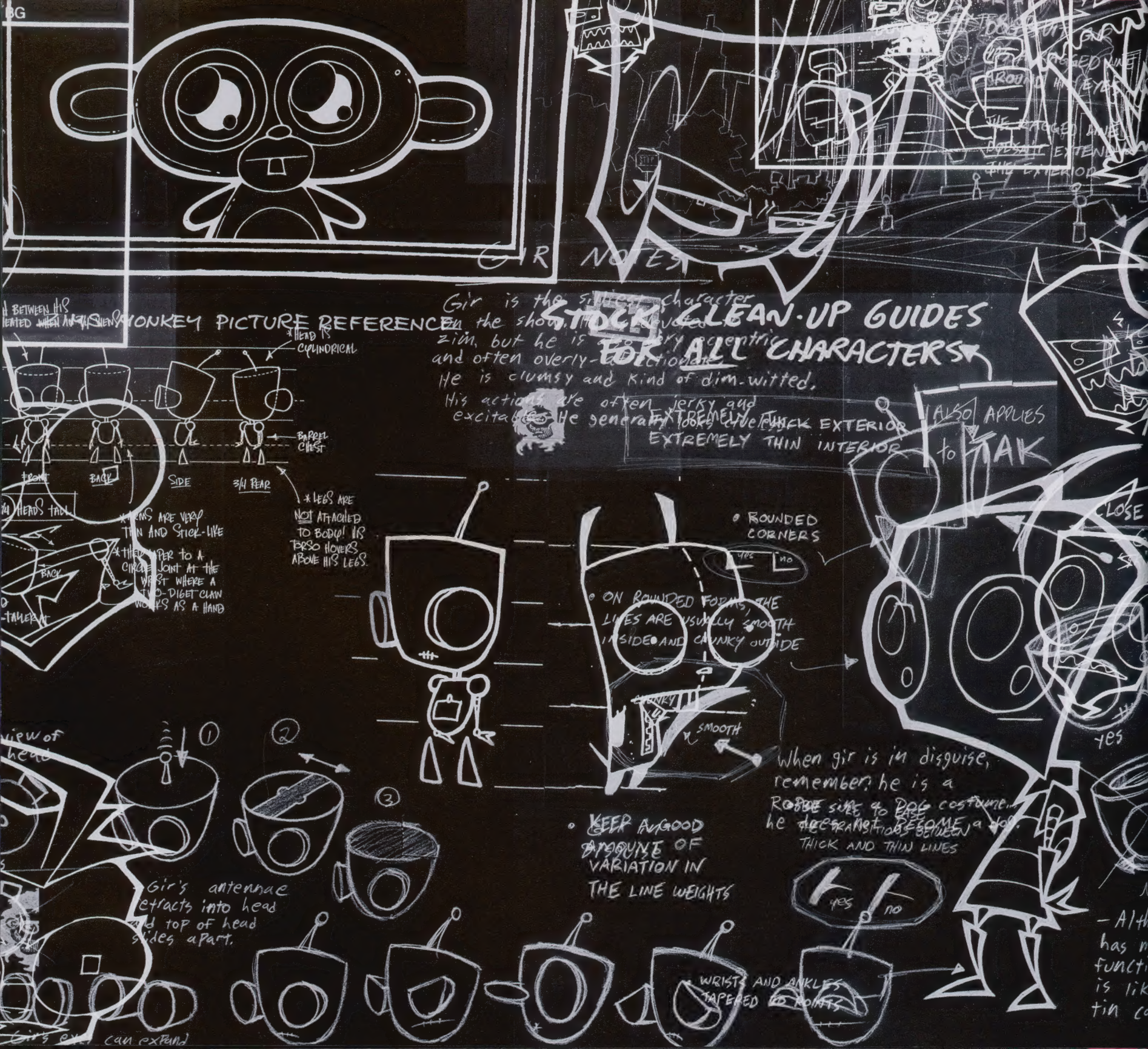


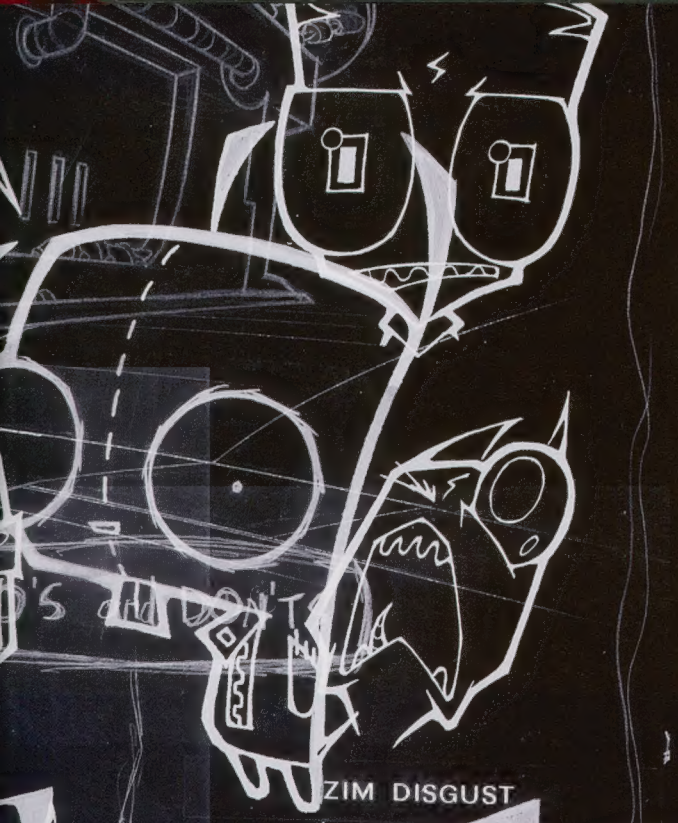


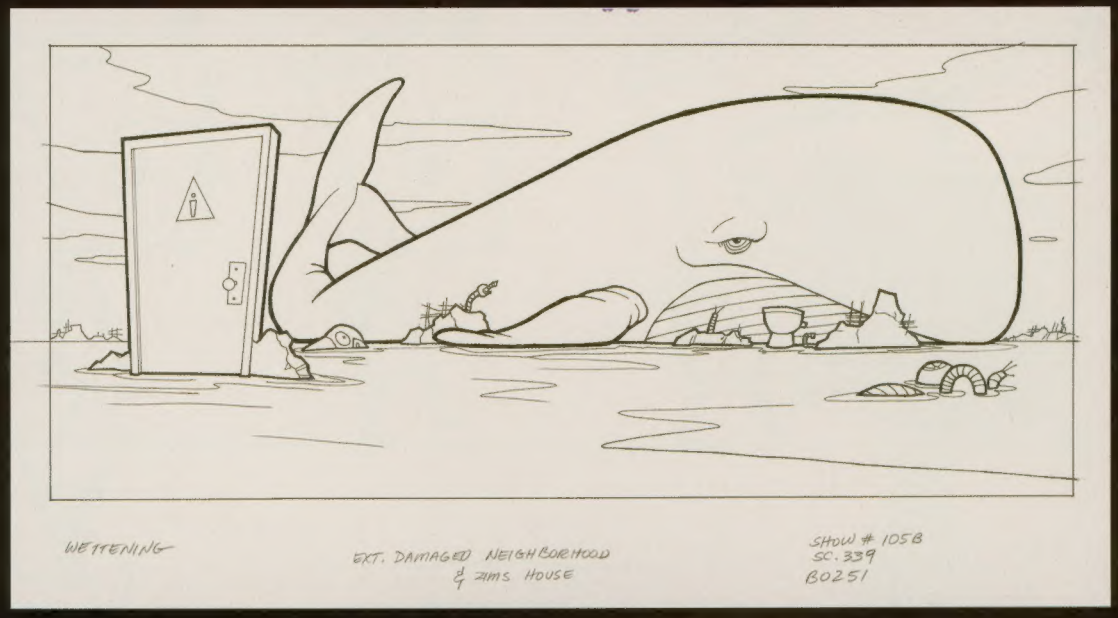



INVADER
ZIM
TM

Written by Chris McDonnell
Foreword by Rebecca Sugar
ABRAMS, NEW YORK


GIR NOTES
Gir is the silliest character in the show. He loves ZIM, but he is very eccentric and often overly-affectionate. He is clumsy and kind of dim-witted. His actions are often jerky and excitable. He generally looks cute.
MONKEY PICTURE REFERENCE
STOCK CLEAN-UP GUIDES FOR ALL CHARACTERS
EXTREMELY THICK EXTERIOR
EXTREMELY THIN INTERIOR
ALSO APPLIES to TAK
* HEAD IS CYLINDRICAL
BARREL CHEST
FRONT
BACK
SIDE
3/4 REAR
* LEGS ARE NOT ATTACHED TO BODY! HIS TORSO HOVERS ABOVE HIS LEGS.
* ARMS ARE VERY THIN AND STICK-LIKE
* THEY ATTACH TO A CIRCULAR JOINT AT THE WRIST WHERE A TWO-DIGET CLAW WORKS AS A HAND
BACK
• ROUNDED CORNERS
YES
NO
• ON ROUNDED FORMS, THE LINES ARE USUALLY SMOOTH INSIDE AND CHUNKY OUTSIDE
CHUNKY
SMOOTH
• KEEP A GOOD AMOUNT OF VARIATION IN THE LINE WEIGHTS
When gir is in disguise, remember he is a ROBOT size to RAG costume... he TRANSITIONS BETWEEN a lot. THICK AND THIN LINES
YES
NO
• WRISTS AND ANKLES TAPERED TO POINTS
Gir's antennae retracts into head and top of head slides apart.
Gir's eyes can expand
CLOSE
yes
- Alth... has ... funct... is lik... tin c...





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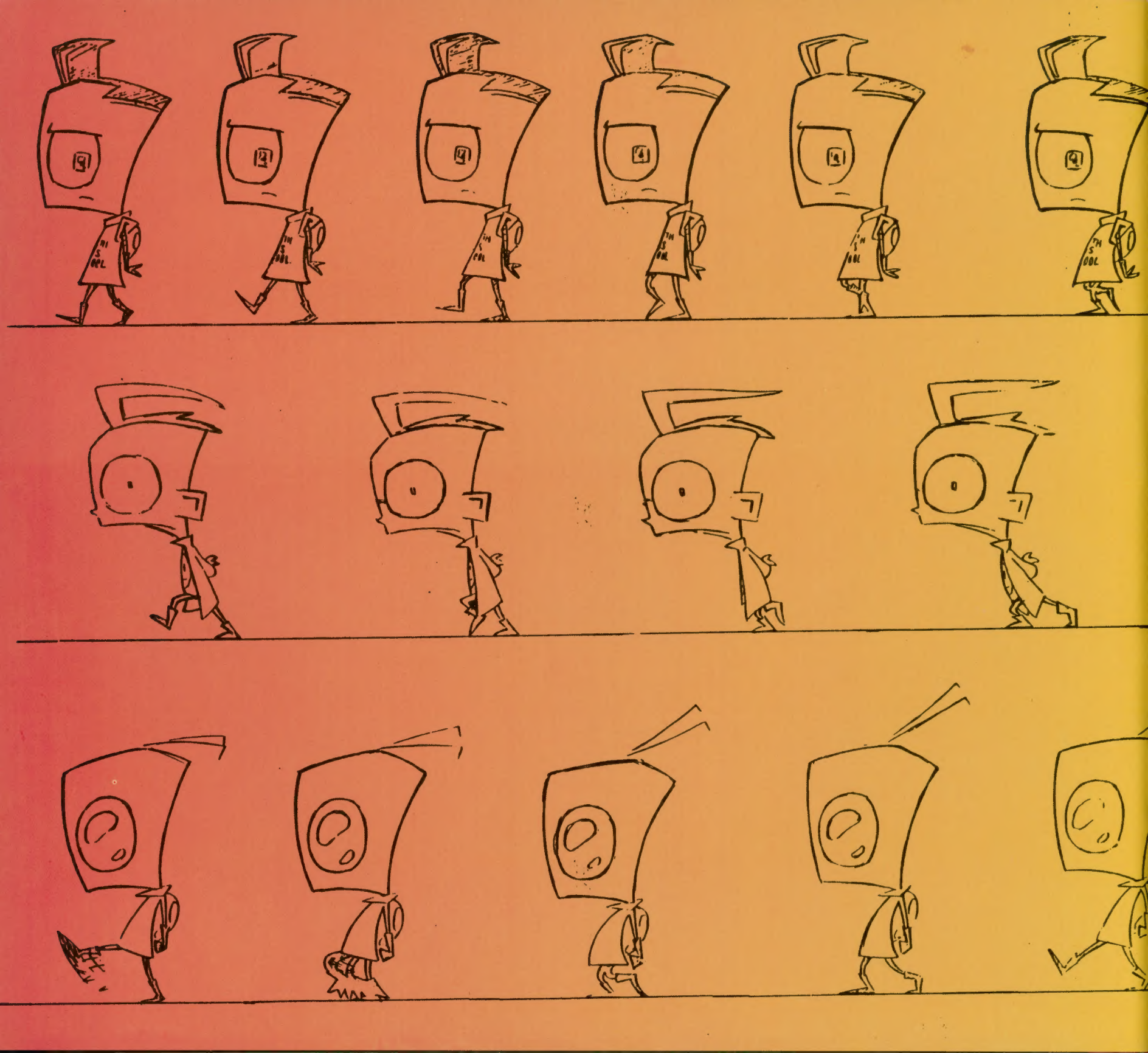
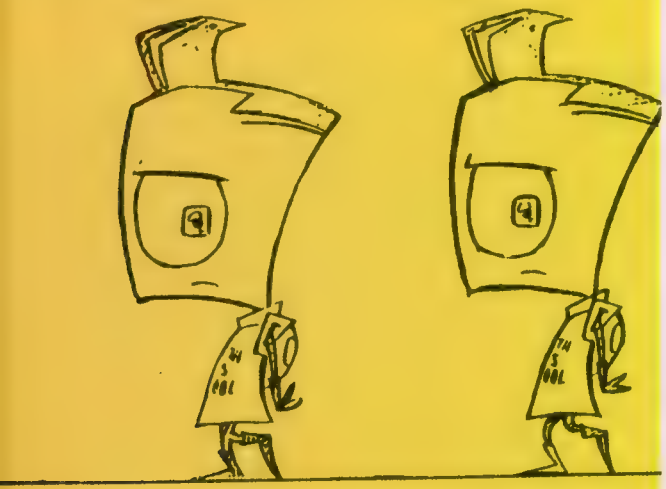
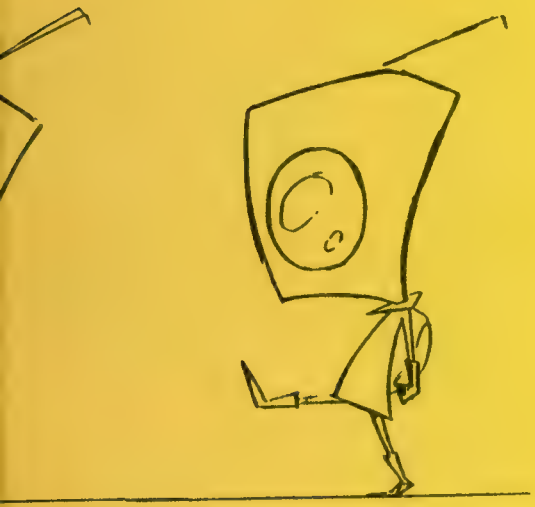






FOREWORD

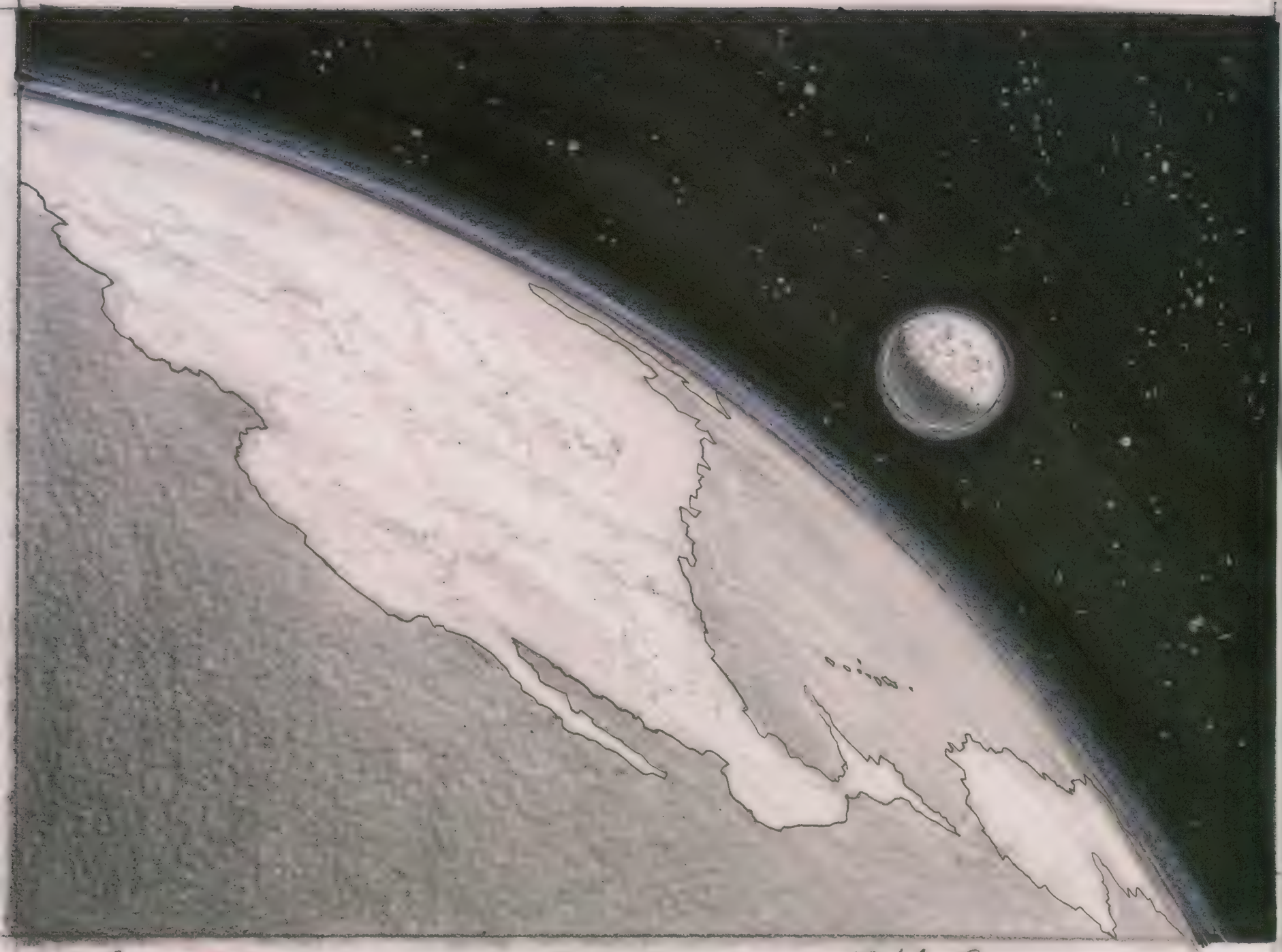
BY REBECCA SUGAR

When I get a chance to meet fans of my cartoon *Steven Universe*, there's usually a lot of crying and hugging involved. I'm often asked if I'm surprised by the intensity of the fanbase. But I'm not surprised at all. It's something I truly understand, because of *Invader Zim*.

The nineties weren't the best time to be a queer kid. I entered middle school cautiously optimistic, and came out the other side sure that I was unlovable garbage. Worst of all, unlike most of my classmates, I didn't stop liking cartoons, so I was also a nerd, which at the time was not at all cool. But then, suddenly, like fate, there was *Invader Zim*. Its particularly misanthropic point of view hit me at exactly the right time. There was something about Dib especially—his ability to see the obvious and incredible truth while all the other kids went along obliviously with their lives really struck a chord with me. It reminded me of my own obsession with cartoons, which began to pool entirely into *Zim*. It felt like an incredible secret, a tether that was grounding me, a source of power. No one could sway me from loving this show, or from loving cartoons. If they couldn't see what I saw in it, they were all wrong and I was definitely right. If they missed what made it special, then that was their loss.

Zim became a massive part of my high school experience. I found other fans at school to gush about the show with. I followed fan artists online, and read and wrote fan fiction. I doodled the characters all over my schoolwork. I drew a comic imagining what it might be like to meet Jhonen, and how I would definitely faint. I couldn't understand that he was human. Or maybe I couldn't understand that I was human. I saw humans doing human things all around me but I felt empowered to be different, even if it meant suffering. I suppose I hadn't seen that before: a story about how being different meant being punished constantly.

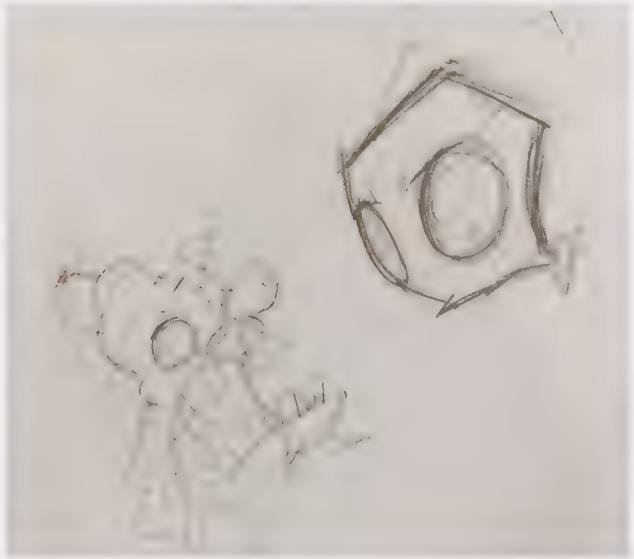
Left: Walk cycle tests from the *Invader Zim* pilot episode.

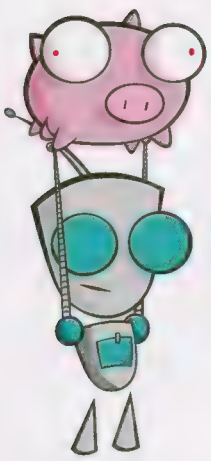


Reference

Ext Earth 104A Genm=

ZIM





It felt true, unlike the feel-good pap about how great it is to be unique. *Zim* made me feel like I could cut through that noise. *Zim* made me ambitious, *Zim* made me friends, and *Zim* gave me some sort of ground to stand on in my own mind. *Zim* gave me permission to be angry at the kids who made fun of me. *Zim* let me laugh about how miserable I was!

I feel that *Invader Zim* will be forever woven into the fabric of my life. I can't separate it from my most formative experiences, even the painful ones. (Especially the painful ones.) But it is because of this that I understand the immense power of an animated TV show, especially when it's encapsulating a distinct and deeply personal point of view. As much as I burn with embarrassment to write about all this, my parasocial relationship with Jhonen gave me such strength and direction that I honestly don't know who I would have been without it. Since getting to know Jhonen, and myself, a whole lot better, I can say with certainty that we are both humans . . . and I find myself looking cautiously but fondly at obsession and embarrassment as deeply human things to feel, even when they're evoked by a cartoon. (Especially when they're evoked by a cartoon.)

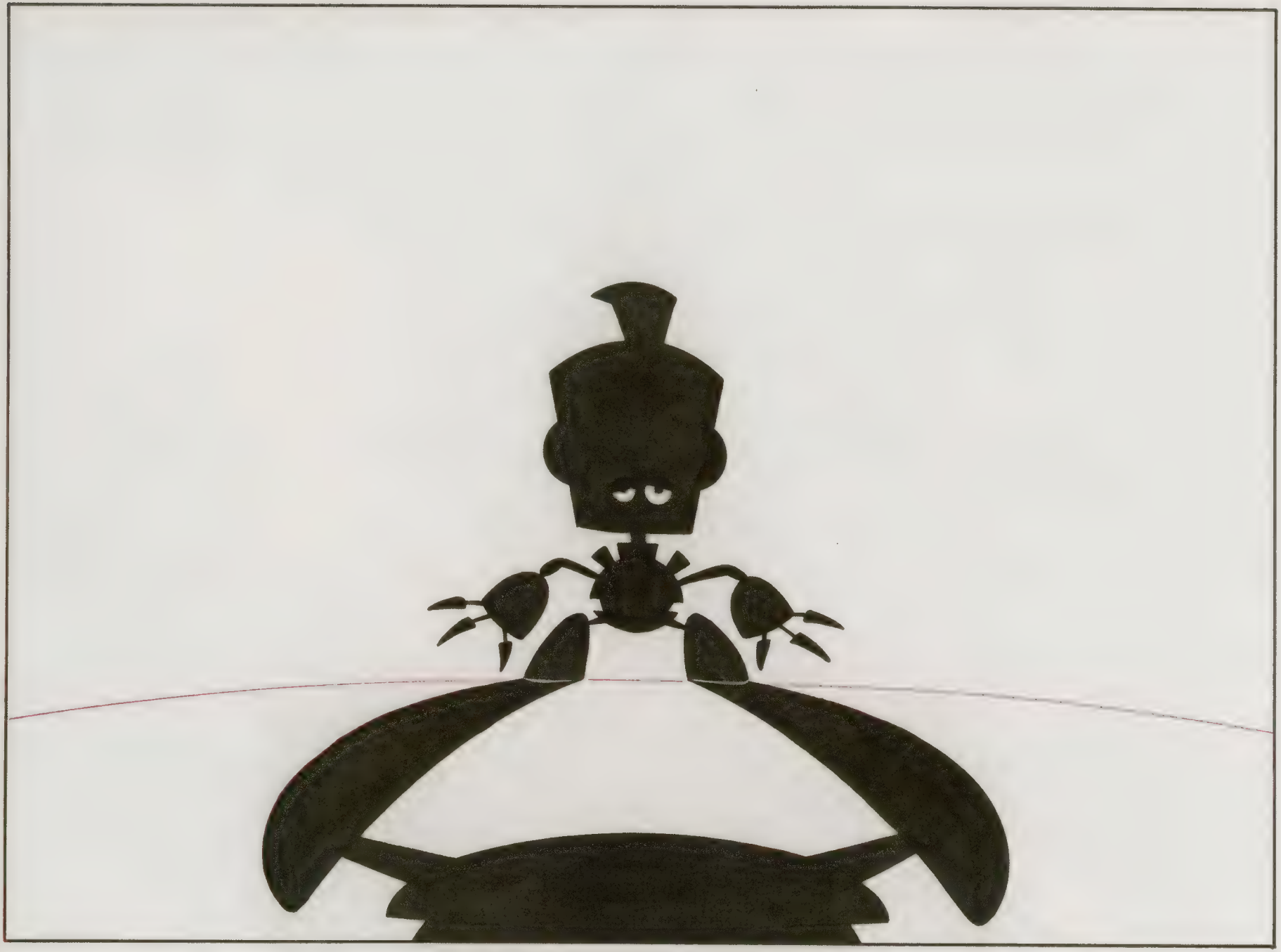
I wonder as you pick up this book what your relationship is to this show and these characters and this art. I wish I could know what this show meant to you, when you discovered it, and why it resonated with you. In addition to what this show meant to you personally, I hope you can also love these drawings as lines on paper, and love these artists as human beings.

—RS

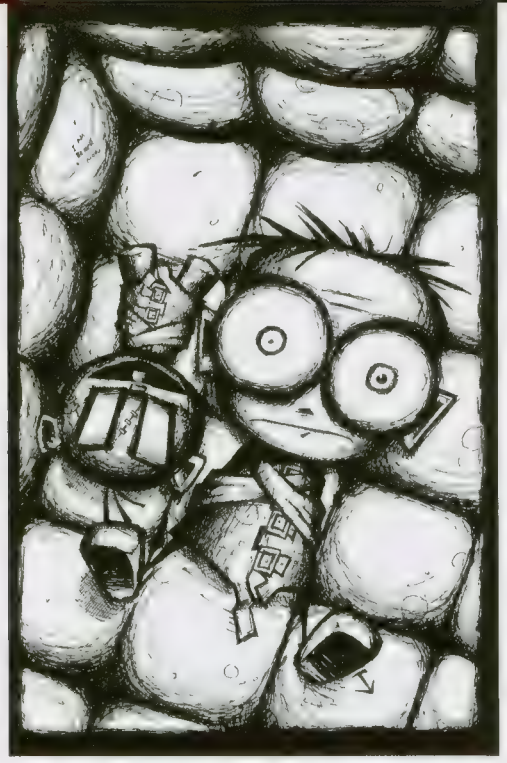
Rebecca Sugar is a *New York Times* bestselling author and the creator of the Emmy-nominated show *Steven Universe* on Cartoon Network. She previously worked as a writer and storyboard artist on Cartoon Network's animated series *Adventure Time*. She's an artist, songwriter, and director.

Opposite: Layout drawing from the episode "Germs" (EP4A). Artwork by Spencer G. Davis.

Above: Concept art by Jhonen Vasquez.



PILOT "INVADER ZIM" OL/UL SC-100



1: SMALL PRESS, BIG STUDIO

THE HISTORY OF ZIM

Cosmic Beginnings

In a hostile galaxy, Earth had grown soft. Once a savage planet ruled by gigantic, terrible dinosaurs, time passed, and it became populated with patchy-haired primates. These simple Earthlings spent their time milling about malls, consuming weenies, and idolizing breakfast-cereal mascots. Earth lay exposed: an easy target for intergalactic invasion.

Deep in space, the Irken Empire was commencing Operation Impending Doom 2. The Irkens' goal was total, universal conquest. The most elite Irken invaders were called to gather on the convention planet Conventia. Each invader was assigned a robot sidekick, a ship, and their own planet to infiltrate. Invaders were to blend in with the native inhabitants, gather intelligence, assess weaknesses, and prepare for the Irken Armada's approaching conquest.

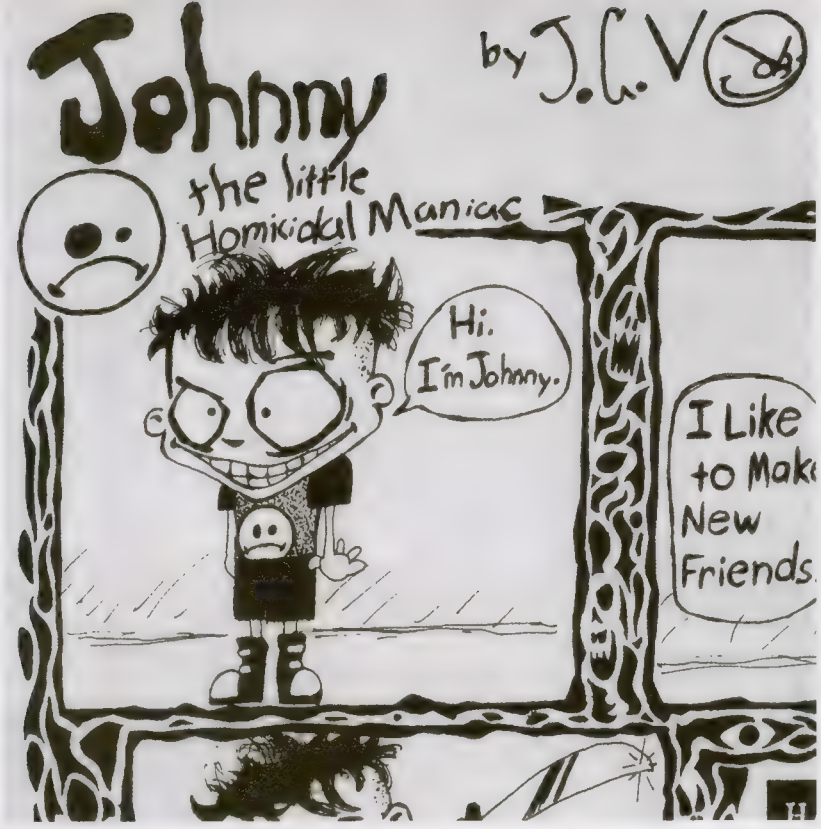
The event was orchestrated by the Almighty Tallest, the two supreme Irken leaders whose sole claim to authority was their tall stature. The first Irken invader called to the convention stage surprised the Tallest: He had grown. Impressed, the Tallest assigned this invader to the planet with the universe's most comfortable couch. Things were running smoothly.

Surprising all in attendance, a remarkably small invader burst into the orderly event. It was Invader Zim. Previously an operative for Operation Impending Doom 1, he had inadvertently sabotaged that mission by starting the destruction even before leaving his home planet, Irk. As a result, Zim had been banished to work food service on the planet Foodcourtia.

Now, having crashed the ceremony, Zim stood front and center, awaiting confidently his next assignment, as if he weren't the sole cause of the previous disaster. Hatching a plan, the snickering Almighty Tallest assigned Zim to that mysterious, faraway planet,

Opposite: A layout drawing from the pilot episode of *Invader Zim*.

Above: Squee, one of Jhonen's pre-*Zim* characters first introduced in the comics series *Johnny the Homicidal Maniac*, is pictured here spending some time in the rubber room.



Earth—so mysterious that Earth wasn't even on the Irken map. Compounding their nefariousness, the Tallest issued Zim a sidekick robot harvested from the trash, with a brain made of pocket lint and refuse. Zim and his malfunctioning robot Gir enthusiastically set off for Earth. Zim knew that he was the best Irken for the job. He only had to prove it. Cleverly disguising himself as a normal green boy (and Gir as a normal green dog), Zim began his life as an Earthling. By day, Zim attended Skool with the other human youngsters, and by night, Zim churned with manic paranoia in his secret underground base, plotting against perceived threats and concocting diabolical countermeasures. Gir spent his time enjoying tacos and befriending a pig, among other things.

In Zim's head, the Almighty Tallest would be pleased. This was the only thing that his little invader's heart desired.

Zim, as it turned out, was not the invader who would conquer the Earth. Zim was the invader that the big, dumb Earth deserved.

Comics Beginnings

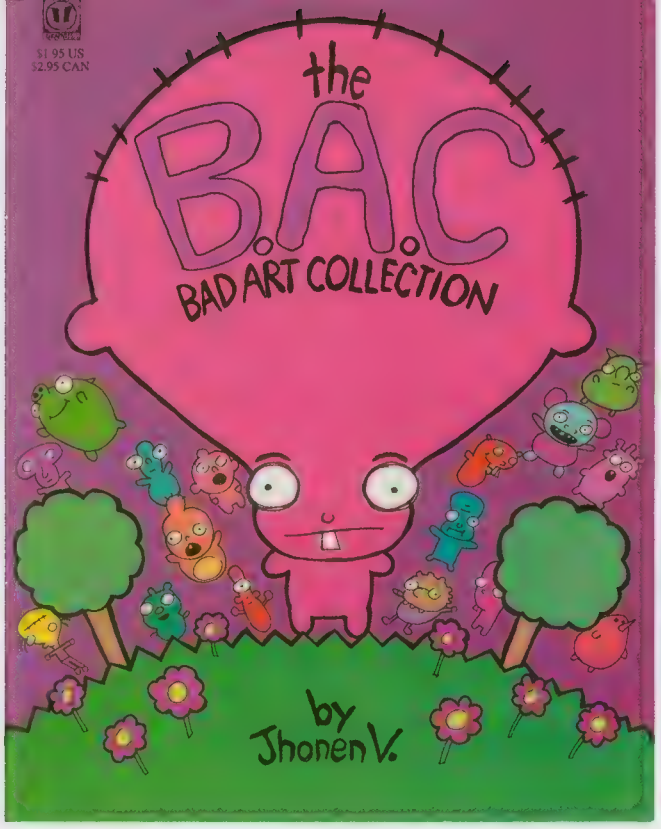
Elsewhere on Earth, around the Earth-year 1990, Jhonen Vasquez was attending East San Jose's Mt. Pleasant High School, where he could often be found sitting in the corner of some classroom or huddled in the cafeteria writing and drawing. Jhonen drew a world of black-and-white characters in the margins of assignment papers and in his sketchbooks in his developing angular style—characters whose angst and fears were pushed to wild extremes.

Jhonen Vasquez [series creator]: My high school experience was pretty typical; I had friends–I wasn't a complete loner–but I did spend a lot of time with my little notebooks writing down stories. I was stuck up in my own head, just drawing and keeping to myself, judging everyone around me. [*laughs*]

One of Jhonen's significant characters first appeared in a comic strip that was published in his high school paper: *Johnny the Little Homicidal Maniac*. This childlike Johnny would gleefully commit murders for laughs in the short setup-and-punchline format of newspaper comic strips. Johnny's victims were cartoon avatars of Jhonen's ire.

Jhonen: I'm pretty sure that I created *Johnny* specifically for the school paper, which sounds insane now. A handful of people thought it was really funny, a majority of people didn't care, and there were probably a few teachers who thought

This page: Johnny the Little Homicidal Maniac made his debut in Jhonen's high school newspaper comics section with a "Hi. I'm Johnny." The murdering commenced in the third panel. *Filler Bunny* comics were sometimes made by Jhonen during all-night sessions to capitalize on the exhaustion and insanity that set in after hours of constant cartooning.



it was not in the best taste. I didn't care. I was just having so much fun making up stuff. I loved that it was being seen. Up until then I had been doing things just for myself and only showing a few friends. Johnny was me having my say in my own particular way.

After Jhonen graduated in 1992, the character's design evolved into an older and taller maniac, and the comic strip format evolved with him into multipage comics. Little Johnny had simply become Johnny, or NNY for short.

Jhonen's fluency in the visual language of comics was developing along with his broadening influences. Independent and small press comics provided inspiration with a breadth of styles and approaches. Do-it-yourself zines and self-published comics provided examples of total artistic freedom and raw expression.

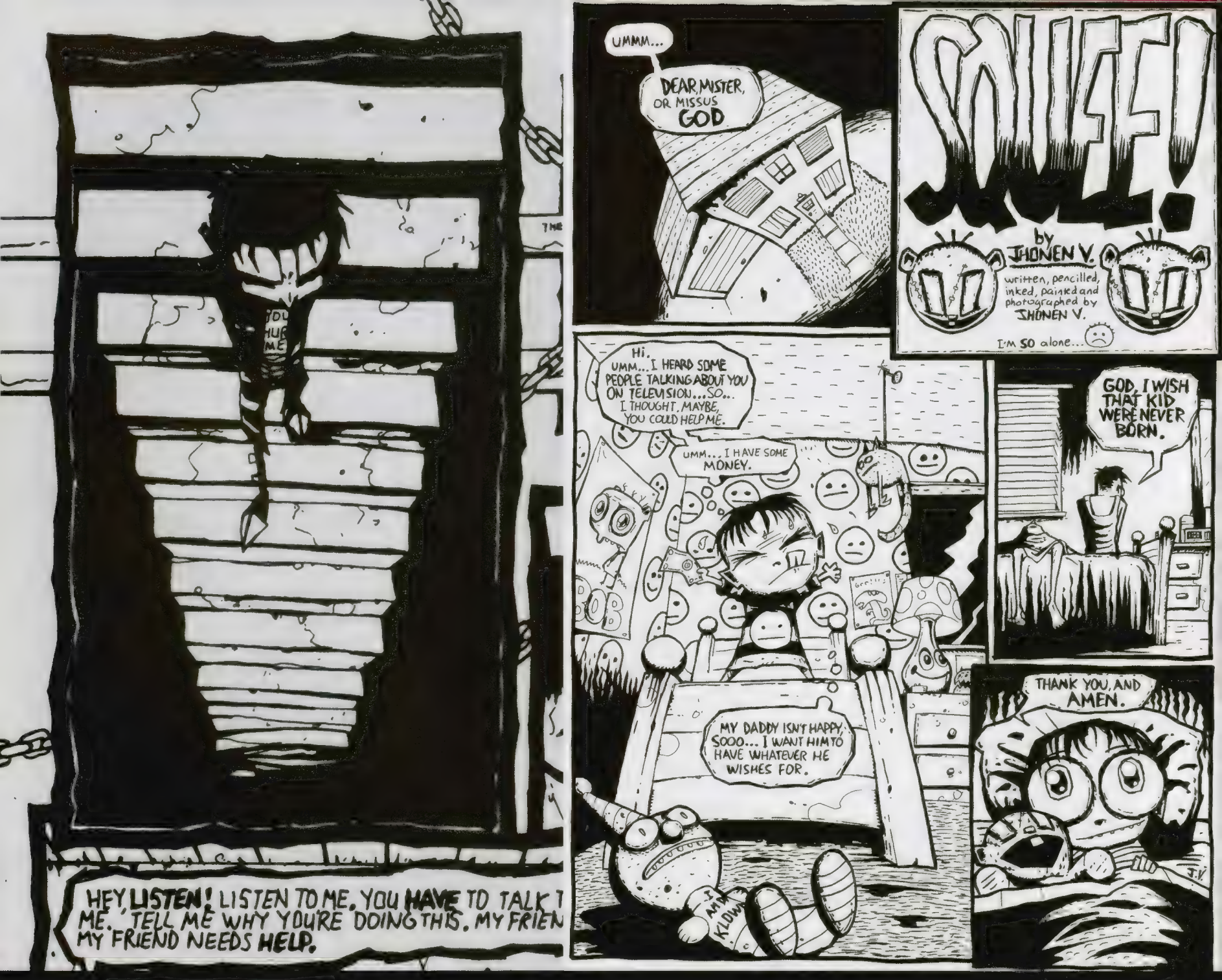
Jhonen: Right at the end and out of high school, I was dating a girl who had a big indie comics collection and she introduced me to a lot of cool stuff. She loved that I was doing comics. In addition to *Johnny*, I was also making all those *Bad Art Collection* comics. I would send her a couple of pages at a time, and she would keep asking for more and more, so I came up with the crappiest, quickest comic I could do and that was *Happy Noodle Boy*.

Next, Jhonen's lifelong fascination with movies led him to study film production. Jhonen attended film school in Cupertino, California, while continuing to create comics. Not long into his studies, Jhonen made the decision to drop out to focus on his comics, which were consuming more of his time and energy, and were beginning to get published. Early *Johnny the Homicidal Maniac* and *Happy Noodle Boy* pages were printed in *Carpe Noctem Magazine*, the self-described "dark art journal." To supplement his comics income, Jhonen worked shifts selling DVDs and disc players at a local retailer, Laserland. Jhonen's efforts began to pay off when *Johnny the Homicidal Maniac*, starring the rail-thin serial killer, was published as a seven-issue limited series in 1995–97 by Slave Labor Graphics, an independent comics press with multiple books that feature dark and off-kilter humor. *Johnny* was Jhonen's first substantial success as a comics creator, and was likewise a hit for Slave Labor.

Comics were blossoming during this fertile period in the nineties. Slave Labor Graphics was one of a constellation of independent press outfits active outside of the "big two"—DC and Marvel—that included Fantagraphics, Drawn & Quarterly, Dark Horse Comics, and more. In addition to these publishers, small

(Continued on page 16)

This page: The cover of *The Bad Art Collection*, which was a collection of mostly one page absurd and humorous comics with titles like "When the Peanuts Wept," "Throbbing Evil Wedgies of Nocturnal Squeezy Cheeze," "Victims of Defective Fajitas," and "Fondling the Intestinal Meat Nibblets." Jhonen's other comics like *Happy Noodle Boy* and *Filler Bunny* shared an ethos of immediacy and improvisation. Above right, *Johnny the Homicidal Maniac* had matured into a comic book format and the character himself grew older and became more nuanced.


SOUFE!
by JHONEN V.
written, pencilled, inked, painted and photographed by JHONEN V.
I'm SO alone...
UMMM...
DEAR, MISTER, OR MISSUS GOD
Hi.
UMM... I HEARD SOME PEOPLE TALKING ABOUT YOU ON TELEVISION... SO.. I THOUGHT, MAYBE, YOU COULD HELP ME.
UMM... I HAVE SOME MONEY.
MY DADDY ISN'T HAPPY, SOOO... I WANT HIM TO HAVE WHATEVER HE WISHES FOR.
I AM KLOWN
GOD, I WISH THAT KID WERE NEVER BORN.
THANK YOU, AND AMEN.
J.V.
HEY, LISTEN! LISTEN TO ME, YOU HAVE TO TALK T
ME. TELL ME WHY YOU'RE DOING THIS. MY FRIEN
MY FRIEND NEEDS HELP.

This spread: Two of Jhonen's primary comics series were *Johnny the Homicdal Maniac* and *Squee!*, which was a spinoff from *Johnny* that featured Johnny's neighbor, the fearful and innocent Squee. Both were published in limited series by Slave Labor Graphics.

and micro presses were producing their own catalogs of books, along with do-it-yourself zinesters, self-publishing collectives, and artists of all sorts.

An umbrella term, "alternative comics," was used to describe this range of material, which varied from glossy graphic novels to photocopied pamphlets to pristinely silk-screened, handmade books with print runs in the tens of copies. The annual gatherings for alternative comics creators and fans to commune were small press comics conventions like Small Press Expo (SPX) in Bethesda, Maryland, and Alternative Press Expo (APE) in the San Francisco Bay Area. Jhonen was a regular guest at APE, where his comics fans would line up down the aisle for his signing appearances—a major convention-style spectacle not typically seen at these indie-centric events.

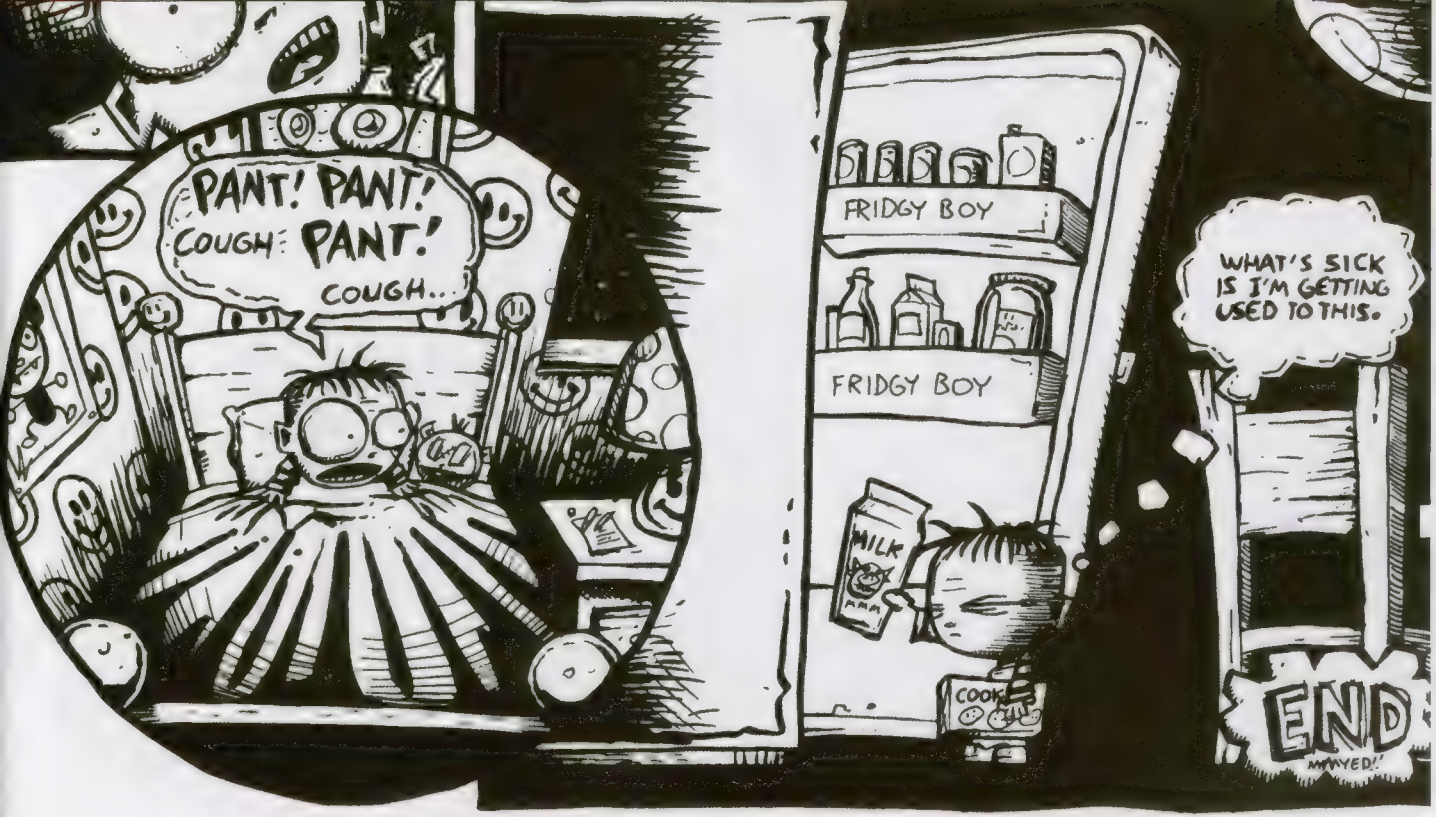
Although Jhonen was coming up in this nineties alternative comics epoch, he traces his earliest comics inspiration to the previous decade's independent comics era: his childhood enjoyment of Kevin Eastman and Peter Laird's *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*. The Turtles had gained worldwide reach through their animated cartoons, feature films, and merchandise, but it was the original eighties black-and-white comics from which they originated that hooked Jhonen.

Jhonen: As a kid I didn't really seek comics out. I was primarily into movies and animation, but when my brother started collecting the *Ninja Turtles* comics, it just triggered something in my brain. I was too young to recognize exactly what it was, but I knew that there was something different about them. I could detect when something felt mainstream and safe, or when it felt more like an outlier. There was something different about those books that just felt dirtier, more dangerous. The characters never seemed healed over from their last battles. I got the sense that there was a real person behind the work on the page like I had never felt before. It's as if the comics were less removed from the initial moment when the creators came up with an idea and were excited to get it down on the page. There was a rawness to it.

This sense that the creator was near, visible, and unique—an undiluted voice—was also evident in Jhonen's own work. *Johnny* is full of fourth-wall-breaking asides that the author makes to the audience; secret images and messages embedded through decorative panel borders; and outrageously abrupt conclusions that jolt readers back out of a story.

Jhonen's approach to making comics foreshadowed his approach to making an animated series, with an emphasis on spontaneity. In comics and animation,

This page: Four separate appearances of Jhonen himself wrestling with his craft (among many more) from the wild and spontaneous pages of *Filler Bunny* comics.



there are many phases of production that can seem monotonous, so Jhonen embraced the chaos of creation, elevating improvisation's importance in the process.

Jhonen: I get impatient, and I like the process to be as spontaneous as I can make it. For my comics, I generally sketch a page a day and then ink it the next. My comics are just very generally outlined, as opposed to being scripted. Up to the moment that I'm inking in the words, I don't know what the characters are going to say, but I know what they have to convey. It keeps the process interesting.

This kind of first-take immediacy was on display in Jhonen's comics such as *The Bad Art Collection* (published in 1996) and *Filler Bunny* (three issues published in 2000, 2005, and 2014), which were experiments in automatic comics creation that Jhonen would create nonstop over twenty-four-hour periods, forgoing sleep. This ethos also later informed Jhonen's approach where ever possible during the production of *Invader Zim*.

Question Sleep

The comics-creator lifestyle was a solitary one for Jhonen. Could he set his own hours? Sure. Maybe spiral into an ever-deepening hole of staying up later and later? Sure.

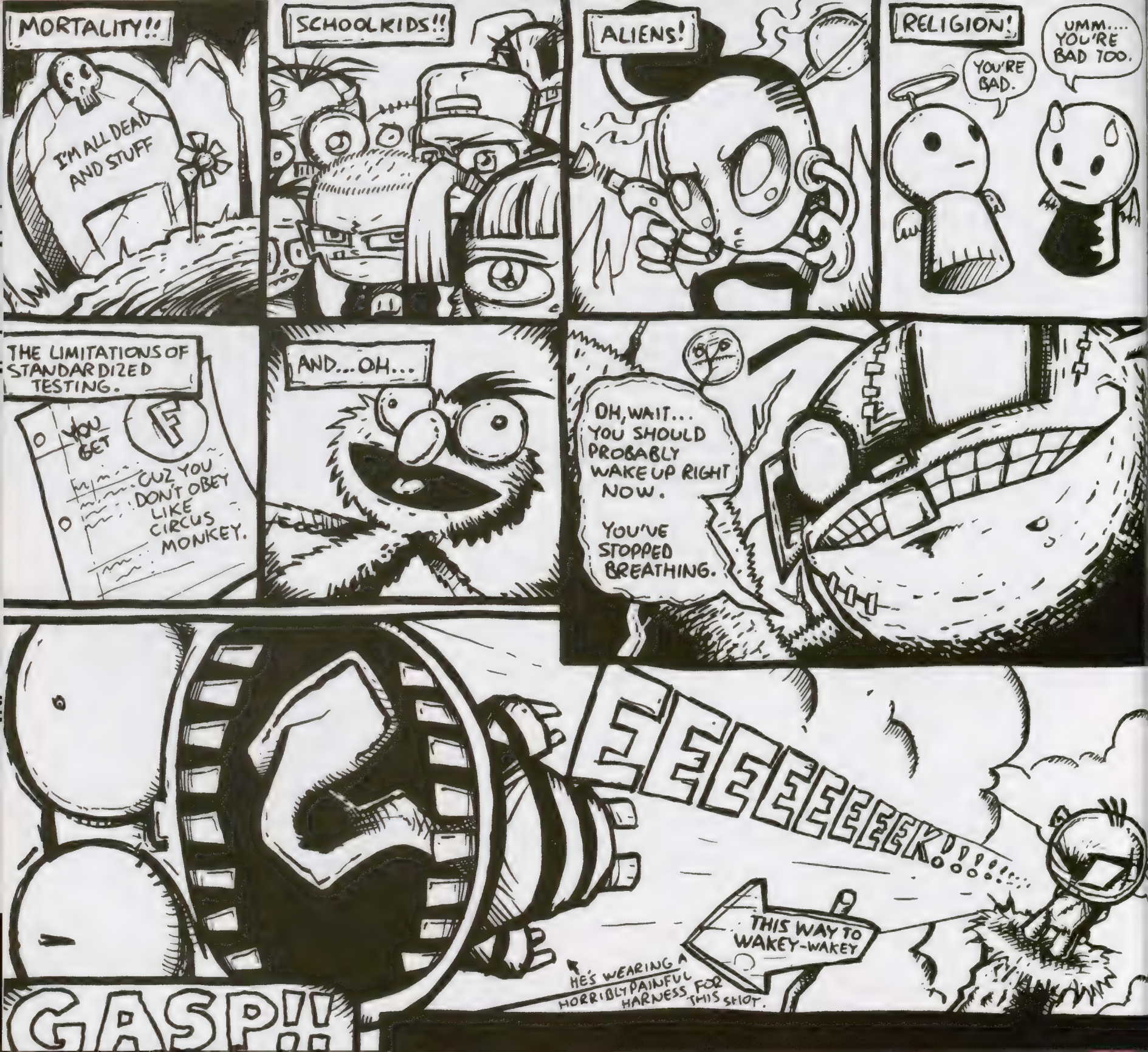
Jhonen: With comics, you sit alone—you can literally go without speaking to people for twenty-four hours. I would finish up a page at three in the morning and then be like, "Welp, time to go out. Where is everybody? It's just me? Okay, I'll go to Taco Bell and get some food I guess." This was me at nineteen years old. And you get kind of weird. It's easy to get really weird, and be aware of it. I mean, it's kind of neat—you feel like this strange ghost that exists in the little times where everyone else is gone and asleep.

Sleep, and questioning it, is an ongoing theme in Jhonen's work. The "director's cut" cover art for the collected *Johnny the Homicidal Maniac* features a big graphic "Z?" front and center, among other places.

Jhonen: The "Z?" motif came out of my preoccupation with just being awake, on several levels. I love consciousness, and I don't know if it's because sleep creeps me out. Lying in bed at night has always been one of the worst times in my day. As far back as I can remember, I've always been very uncomfortable with the idea of letting go of my consciousness, and that has always been a part of my work. It's not a central focus, but Zim doesn't sleep, he doesn't need it;

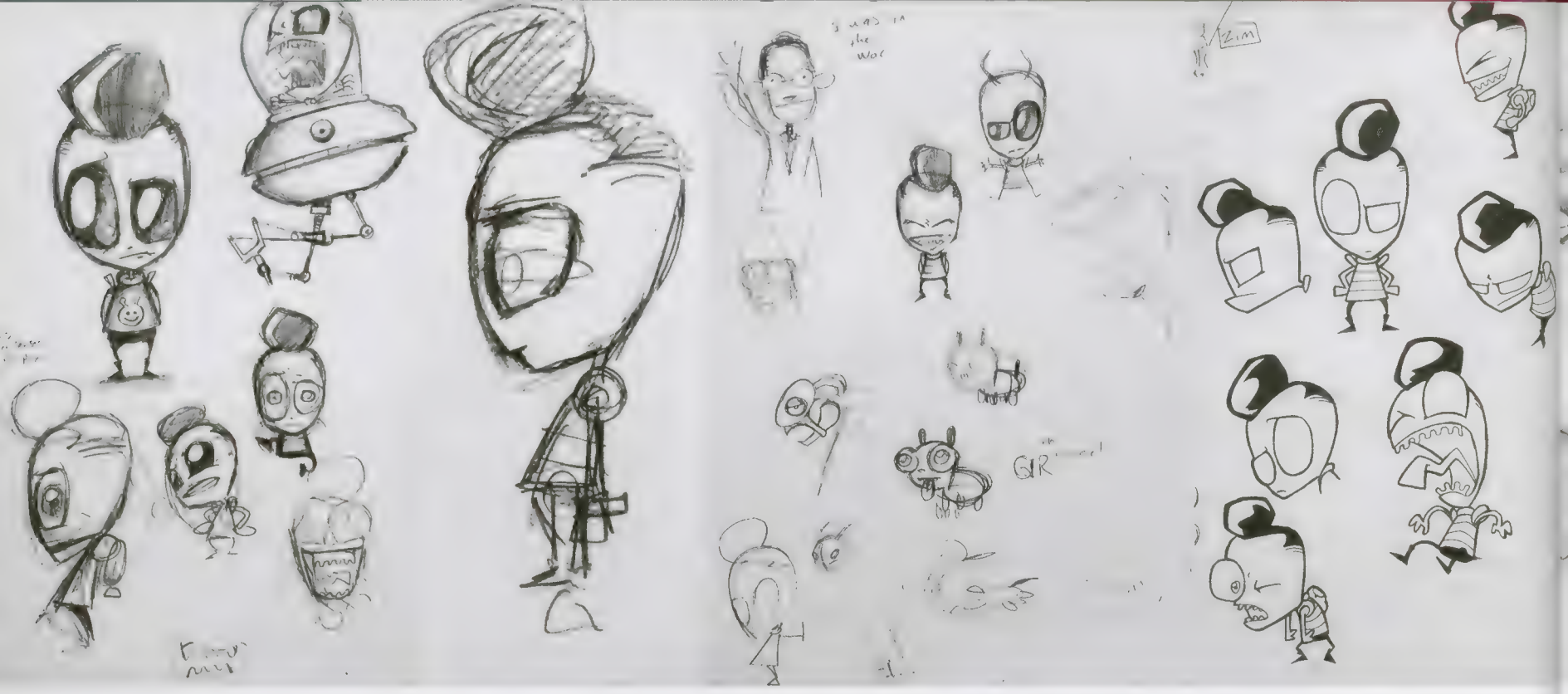
(Continued on page 20)

This page: Squee suffers through another nightmare, and Johnny the Homicidal Maniac sports a question sleep graphic shirt.


MORTALITY!!
I'M ALL DEAD AND STUFF
SCHOOLKIDS!!
ALIENS!
RELIGION!
YOU'RE BAD.
UMM.... YOU'RE BAD TOO.
THE LIMITATIONS OF STANDARDIZED TESTING.
YOU GET
F
CUZ YOU DON'T OBEY LIKE CIRCUS MONKEY.
AND... OH...
OH, WAIT... YOU SHOULD PROBABLY WAKE UP RIGHT NOW.
YOU'VE STOPPED BREATHING.
GASP!!
EEEEEEEEK!!!!
THIS WAY TO WAKEY-WAKEY
HE'S WEARING A HORRIBLY PAINFUL HARNESS FOR THIS SHOT.

Opposite: Aliens appeared in many of Jhonen's early comics work, such as the Zim-like invader in the top row of panels opposite, from *Squee!*

This page: One of Jhonen's earliest drawings of the little green guy, Zim.



Johnny hates sleep, he's terrified of it. He hates the idea of letting go of his grasp of reality, and every time he wakes up he has to readjust and make sure that the dreams weren't real. The "Z?" logo was an idea to give insomnia or the dread and disdain of unconsciousness a logo like a superhero would have. It's not exactly a superpower!

Comics Life

By 1996, six issues of *Johnny* had been published, and Jhonen was able to quit his Laserland day job and focus on comics full time. For any personal artistic-pursuit-turned-career—especially in comics, which is a difficult field to carve out a living in—this was a major accomplishment. It also meant that Jhonen's work was getting noticed, and new opportunities started to present themselves.

In the late nineties, MTV Animation was in its prime. The network was producing a slate of shows that were targeted to an audience of teenagers and young adults. *Liquid Television*, *Æon Flux*, *Beavis and Butt-Head*, *Daria*, and *Celebrity Deathmatch* were some of the longer-running animated series of that period. It was easy to imagine Jhonen fitting in among these surreal, gross-out, satirical, and comedic creations. MTV even had produced a precedent animated series based on an individual's comics work: *The Maxx* by Sam Kieth.

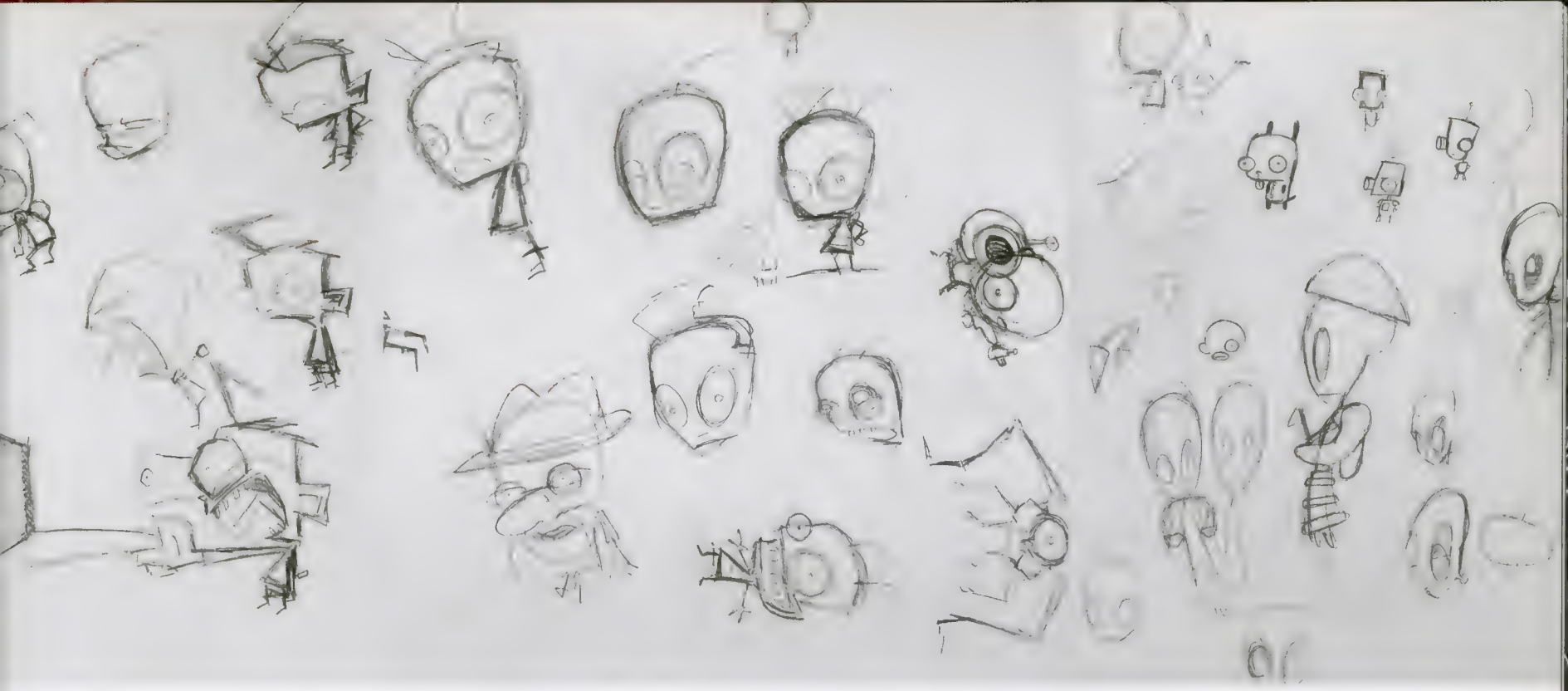
Jhonen: I was approached to do animation stuff by MTV when I was working on *Johnny*. But I was sort of into my comics life. I was like, "I'm busy. I'm working on comics." [*laughs*]

After rebuffing cable's courtship, Jhonen's *Johnny* spun off two more limited comics series, *Squee!* and *I Feel Sick*, in 1997 and 1999, respectively. *Squee!* was about the neglected child who lived next door to Johnny. *Squee!* portrayed dark themes and horror, like *Johnny*, but as experienced through the tiny, wide-eyed boy's perspective. There was a scary, cute, funny, gory alchemy in *Squee!* that resonated with fans—though any sweetness was not enough to render the comics classically child-friendly. Consider Jhonen's comics work, perhaps, as a harder, bloodier, relative to the scary-cute tone of Tim Burton/Henry Selick's stop-motion animated films, or Charles Addams's and Edward Gorey's dark, humorous cartoon illustrations. It is a popular niche that Jhonen's work helped to carve.

Johnny was largely an angry comic, while *Squee!* marinated in fear.

Jhonen: *Johnny* was a bit of both adolescent anger mixed with burgeoning adult fear of how stupid one's own behavior might be. It was a way of making fun of who I could turn into if I didn't have a

This spread: A variety of Jhonen's early development work sketching out ideas for *Invader Zim* characters.



sense of humor and self-awareness of how stupid you sound when you're still a kid but are trying to sound like some kind of godly Hannibal Lecter. *Squee!* was just pure fear–fear of dogs, aliens, toilet tragedies, etc.

As Jhonen continued publishing so many original comics stories designed with appealing characters and a strong directorial perspective, it didn't take long for the siren song of cartoon production to come calling again.

Nick Nick Nick Nick na Nick Nick Niiiiiick

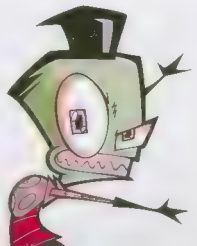
Throughout the 1990s on television, cable network Nickelodeon (a Viacom-owned corporate sibling of MTV) had found success by hiring creators with bold points of view and unusual visual voices. These creators would produce shows that were fresh alternatives to the previous decade, which had been largely dominated by toyetic Saturday morning cartoons on the broadcast networks. *Doug* (premiering in 1991), *Rocko's Modern Life* (1993), *Hey Arnold!* (1996), and a truckload of other shows produced by studio Klasky Csupo—such as *Rugrats* (1991) and *Aaahh!!! Real Monsters* (1994)—were some of Nick's offerings.

Also premiering in 1991, *Ren and Stimpy* pushed Nickelodeon's broadcast to new, weird extremes, with its body-horror close-ups of festering tooth sockets, cartoonish but extra-dramatic psychological abuse and physical violence, and adult innuendo in the tradition of Warner Bros., Fleischer Studios, MGM, Lantz, and Terrytoons theatrical shorts, which all did much of the same in the first half of the twentieth century. Besides the gleeful grossness of nose goblins, pet farts, and cat barf, *Ren and Stimpy* also showcased virtuoso cartooning and design, and was the instigator of a mini-revolution in TV animation production methods. After *Ren and Stimpy*'s success, many other series adopted its cartoonist- and storyboard-driven approach, which itself was revived from the methods used for mid-twentieth-century theatrical shorts. Many series also copied its stylish visual elements.

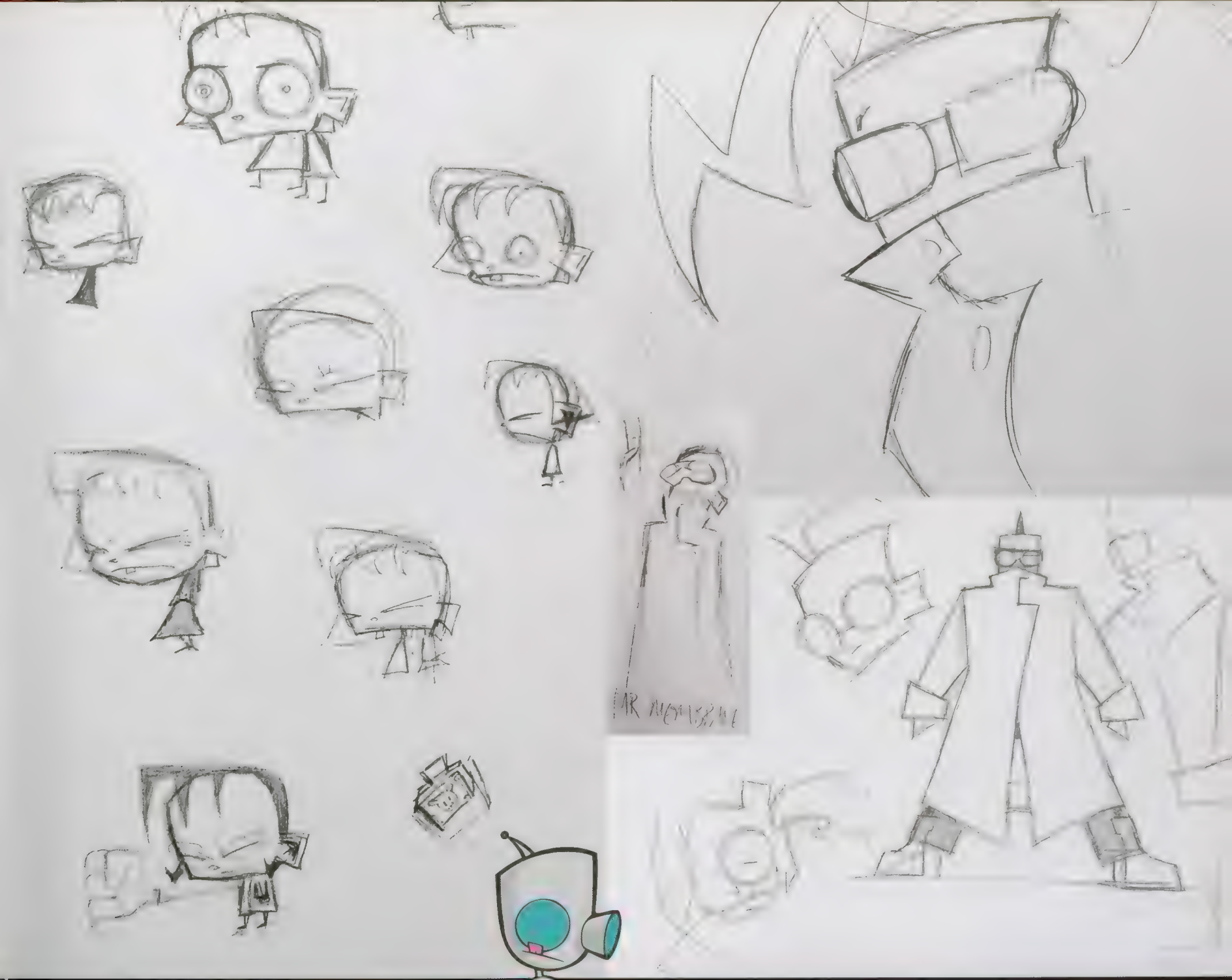
To produce this kind of innovative work, television producers always have their feelers out, searching for potential creative hit makers to partner with. One executive producer, Mary Harrington, worked on several of Nickelodeon's boldest, and perhaps riskiest—but successful—series: *Rocko's Modern Life* and *Ren and Stimpy*. Mary's feelers were not shy of wild material.

Mary Harrington [executive producer]: I saw *Johnny the Homicidal Maniac* and was blown away by Jhonen's art style, his character design. What I also noticed was that it felt very cinematic to me.

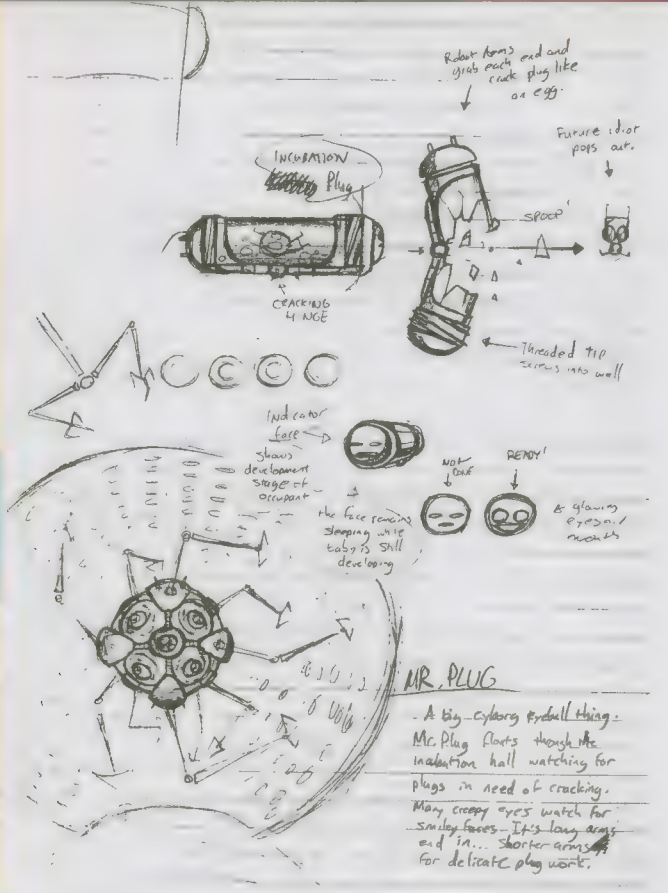
(Continued on page 26)

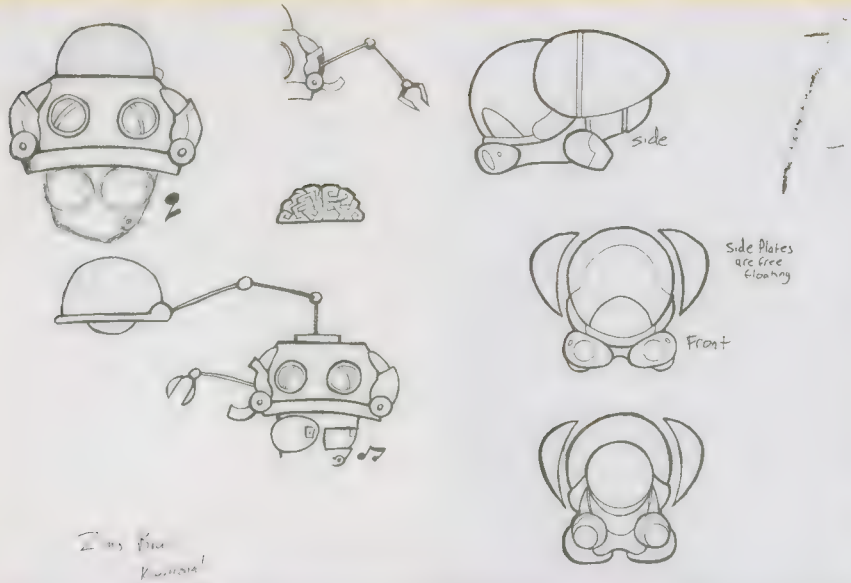


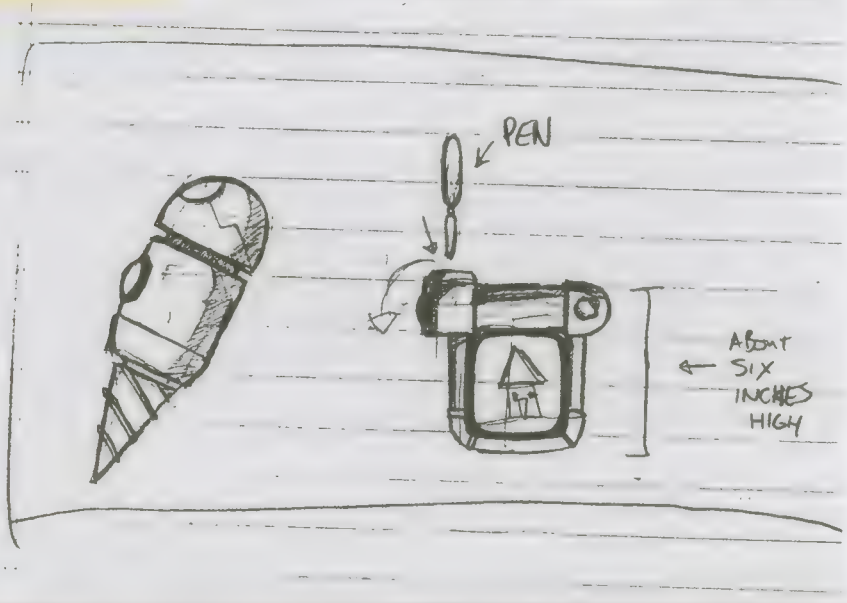
ZIM SKETCHES



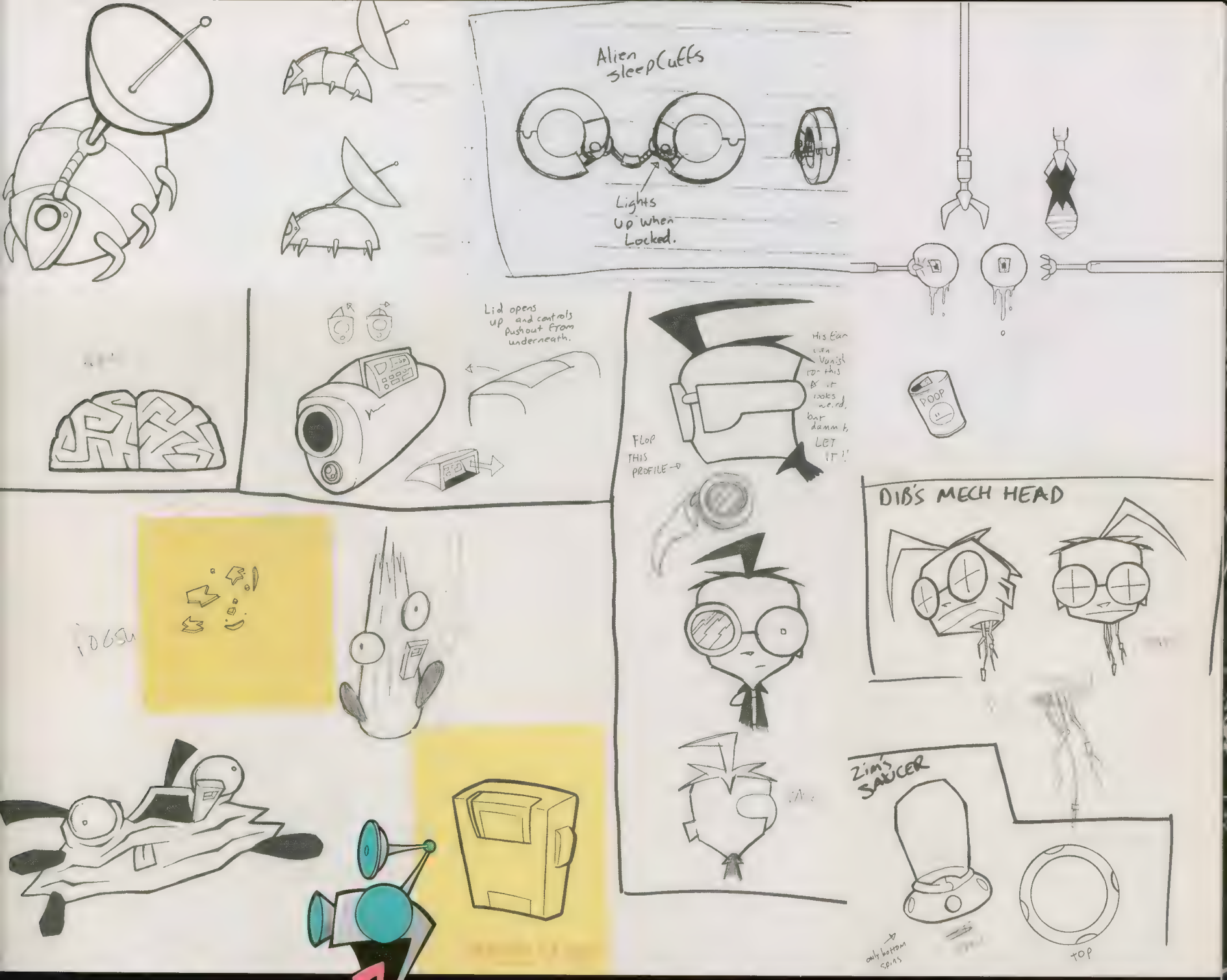
This spread: More early concept sketch work by Jhonen as each of the main characters began to form their more familiar shapes. Many of these drawings are the pencils for artwork that was used in the show bible, which is a document that details the characters, world, and potential stories.







ZIM SKETCHES



This spread: Jhonen's early concept sketches including the sci-fi mechanics of the S.I.R. dispenser with its H. R. Giger–influenced spinal-column aesthetics, Mr. Plug, the giant cyborg eyeball that cracks open the incubators of sufficiently gestated Irkens, Zim's brain removal cap, and more.

Jhonen felt like someone who was going to become a director. I could see it in the way that he composed the shots in his comic book.

Jhonen was intentional with each comics panel, moving the point of view around as if he held a camera on the action, creating a rhythm of shots with the drawings. Wide shots, extreme close-ups, up and down angles, forced perspective and lens distortion can be found all on one page of *Johnny*. Placed in the dense overall layout of each page with black borders and gutters as opposed to the typical white space between panels, the panels appear to be mini screens glowing from the darkness that one might imagine coming to life in sequence as the eye follows along.

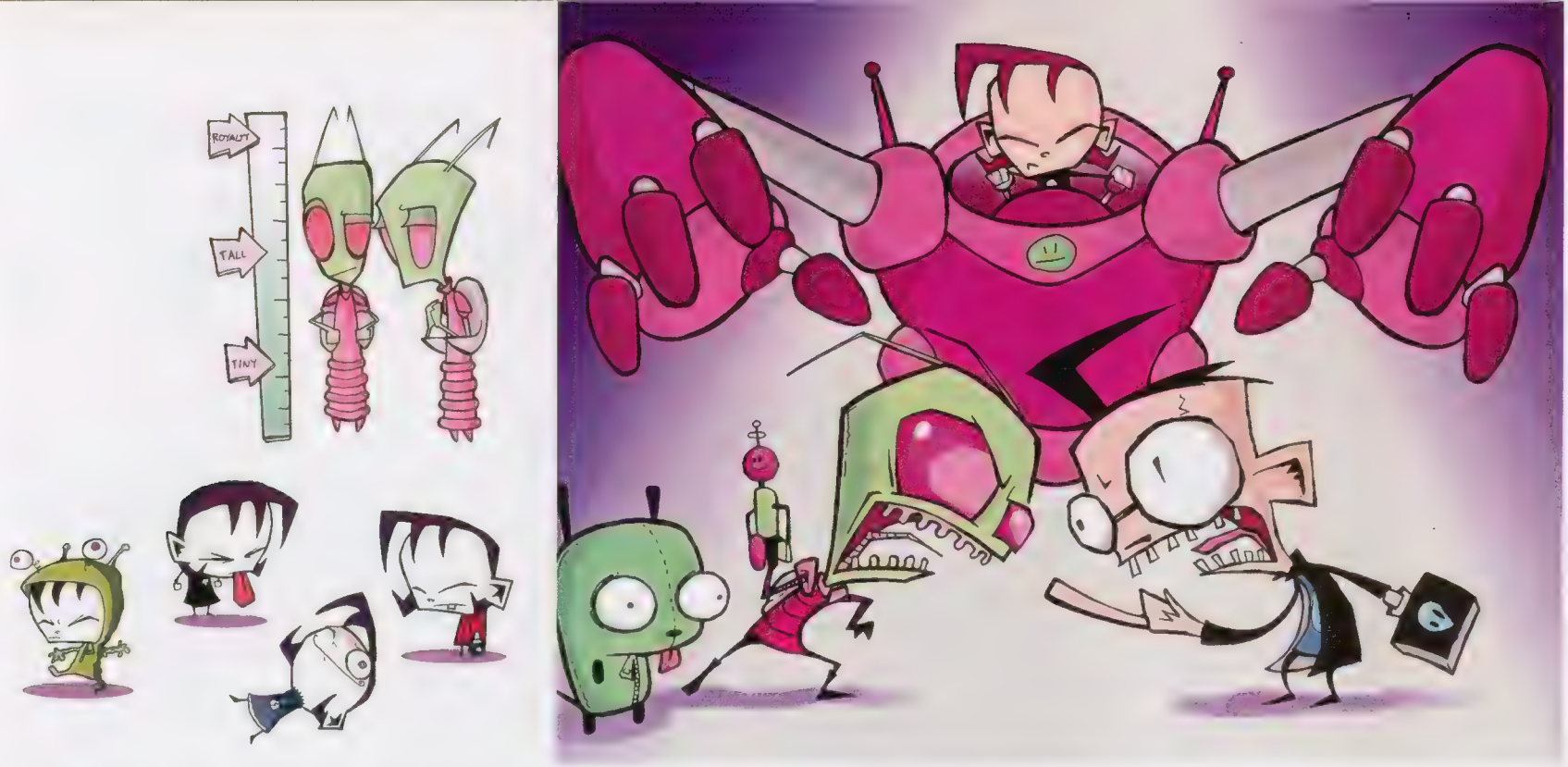
Mary: But what really intrigued me was the way he developed the characters. There was a tone and a humor that I felt could definitely translate to kids and keep the adult audience. For instance, Johnny, who's a homicidal maniac, had this wonderful relationship with Squee! And because of this relationship, you'd have empathy with Johnny. I was fascinated that I had empathy for this horrible character. Jhonen really understands characters very well. And he's funny, too. I had to track him down.

Mary found Jhonen via cartoonist and Slave Labor publisher Dan Vado, and she sat down to talk with Jhonen in San Jose.

Mary: By the time I met with Jhonen, I had several successful projects behind me. One of the key points that I stressed was that I really felt that I understood his creative voice, and that by working with me, and by doing a project with Nickelodeon, we wouldn't ruin his brand. That I got it. And that he would still be cool. We would not lose that. I had worked on projects where the creative and creators had a very strong tone, and we were successful in translating that to a television show.

Jhonen: I didn't think it was weird that I was approached by Nickelodeon at all. Every time people talk about me working on the series back in the day or even now, it's become a joke—about how crazy it was to ask me to do a kids' show. But to me, it's not weird for me to think up a kids' show, or a show of any type. I love everything. I mean, I get it. People are used to seeing my stuff and describing it as "adult." I was in my teens when I was working on *Johnny* and my comics and stuff, and a lot of Johnny comes from my teenage years. But it was "adult" in the sense that there was murder and characters

This spread: Artwork from the series bible by Jhonen.



cursing, which to too many people is what "adult" is. But it was still pretty childish.

It was never weird for me to develop something like *Invader Zim*. I grew up loving all kinds of stuff, so it's almost offensive to have people be weirded out at the thought of me coming up with something that kids can watch.

This was still kind of right on the edge of *Ren and Stimpy*, so I wasn't thinking, "Cartoons are stupid and for little kids." I was just thinking, "I can maybe do something that someone would like as much as I like *Ren and Stimpy*!"

Nickelodeon's pitch to me was that they wanted a show that was going to appeal to older kids, and not something to compete with, I don't know, some cuddly show from the time. Tonally, they were looking for something that was going to be a little more mature. It didn't work out! [*laughs*]

Mary: I asked him to come up with an idea for a series. I was passionate about his work, and I think he trusted me, and I'm glad he did. He pitched *Zim*, and I loved it. I felt that there was a tone that older kids and adults could get into, but I felt the core characters and the core situation and the whole premise of the show was very kid-relatable.

Mary became the champion and steward of Jhonen's project about a little green invader. Jhonen set to work expanding his initial ideas and sketches into a production bible. In it, the Irken race is initially referred to as "the NOYING, from the planet Irk."

Jhonen: It was just a stupid play on words–the word annoying. Which I quickly got rid of to simplify things.

The bible was complete with story springboards, many of which became series episodes. One idea that never quite made it even into the bible was the story of Zim and the sleep weasels.

Jhonen: There was an idea that was always in the back of my mind and I thought we'd get around to it. It was something with Zim and all these filthy weasels: Zim tried to put the entire world to sleep, but in order to do so, he had to convince the whole planet to put these weasels on their heads. Sleep weasels. They put you to sleep, and they were weasels, and you put them on your head. But the entire joke was that you had to do it willingly. So Zim was trying to make these weasels a fashionable thing. We never made that episode.

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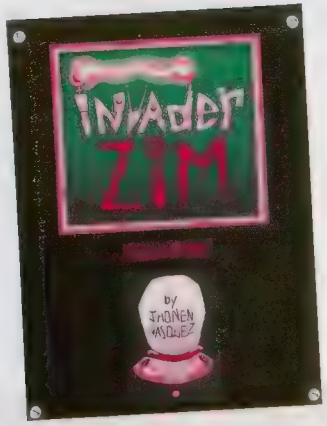
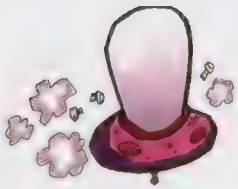




ZIM is perhaps most aptly described as a little green guy with a fierce and overwhelming confidence and persistence, an unmatchable work ethic and a bottomless reservoir of energy.

His stature is describable as "little" not only here on Earth, where any descendant of IRK would be considered diminutive, but also among his own people, where height determines one's standing in society. Considered fairly repellent in his eagerness, in addition to being a runt, ZIM was born into a life of detriment and treated as one who could expect little social advancement. ZIM'S superpower, however, is his overwhelming tenacity, never acknowledging the elements in him that, to an outside observer, might be seen as limitations in his personality and physique. Even though he might appear half as capable at any given task, he will be twice as eager as the next NOYNG to tackle it, rushing in with a display of obscene effort, however idiotic the task may be and despite a total lack of any preplanning on his part.

His devotion to Mission: Earth provides a fine insight into these personality traits. Despite the fact that he is sent to the planet farthest from those affected by Operation Impending Doom in a thinly veiled attempt to get rid of him (Earth isn't even on the Noyng map of the Galaxy, it's penciled in on a piece of paper taped to the wall next to it like some cosmic footnote), he salutes ferociously and dives into his mission, unwilling to let anything stand in his way.

Possessing a supernatural emotional equilibrium, ZIM will always fall back into a state of paranoia, dread and the desire to come out on top, whether he emerged victorious or was himself temporarily vanquished.

It would be a mistake to assume that ZIM is stupid. A more accurate adjective might be "misguided," thanks largely to the gaping hole in his head where information on Earth should be. Unfortunately, most of the information he's getting now is from his fellow schoolchildren, who, while by no means mentally deficient, have a completely different set of priorities and a more imaginative way of looking at things. ZIM has no concept of this fact and therefore his reaction to being given "THE COOTIES," for example, might be to march directly into a teacher's office and demand, with straight faced urgency that she / he "explain these COOTIES of which the children speak!" Being the "green kid," and definitely different, makes him exceedingly vulnerable to these types of attacks (not to mention the fact that kids will always home in on the kid they can get the most dramatic reaction out of).

ZIM makes many assumptions about Earth and her strange inhabitants, most of which are untrue and all of which he takes as absolute fact. Upon observing that all human families have at least one garbage can, he assumes they MUST be vitally important, perhaps even sacred. What an awesome show of force it would be to vaporize the garbage can belonging to a bullying classmate. How devastating it would be! The humans would lose all feelings of security and abandon faith in their tall President. He might even rush back home and watch the television, waiting in vain for the flood of broadcasts announcing the ungodly garbage can devastation that has blighted the planet.

One of ZIM's mighty weaknesses is an unseen enemy, allergies. He's allergic to things he has no idea he's allergic to with no law or order to his reactions, so they can pretty much manifest themselves in countless ways. His head can suddenly swell up to three times its normal size, he can be seized by nightmarish sneezing fits, his entire body can liquify, or his voice can be extremely altered, and these things almost always happen to him at the worst possible time, when ZIM feels he has to be at the top of his form. The sources of his pain are pretty clear to the viewer, sometimes accompanied by hyper fast zooms into floating bacteria and then following it into ZIM's delicate little body, but ZIM is normally baffled by this sudden sickness.

At the end of every day, ZIM reports to the ALMIGHTY TALLEST, from whom an acknowledgement of any kind (whether real or imagined) will fill him with unimaginable INVADER'S pride (it's like normal pride, but with more stuff in it). He practically lives for the respect of his leaders, who usually meet his reports with indifference or mock interest. This doesn't stop him from a boastful and proud display regarding his stupendous accomplishments, accomplishments that would make ordinary observers scratch their heads in wonder at the meaninglessness.

The real satisfaction, however, comes from being able to boast to his alien INVADER peers about what amazing and death defying things he has done in the course of his stay on Earth. NOYNG INVADERS are highly competitive, almost to a freakish extent, and ZIM is no exception. Gatherings on the home planet, or more commonly the convention center planet, Conventia, are frequent and filled with INVADERS all trying to blow each other away with tales of incredible feats.

ZIM's presence on Earth is not limited to his impersonation of a schoolchild. He also has a variety of different Earth disguises. Wearing only a giant beard, he can seamlessly blend in as an old man. A disturbingly tiny old man. A disturbingly tiny, vomit green old man.

DIB: Relentless pursuer of the paranormal, he's the elementary school Fox Mulder (with slightly more emotional range). Dib is the "gifted child" of his school, capable of far more scientifically and intellectually than any of his classmates, and he knows it. He is the son of the one and only PROFESSOR MEMBRANE, the man responsible for thousands of amazing inventions and miraculous cures that he discovers every day, as well as the enormously popular kid's show "ASK MISTER MEMBRANE."

Aside from being a tireless supernatural investigator, Dib is quite the little scientist / inventor himself, not that his far too busy father notices. You see, dad has become numb to amazing scientific discoveries, so he will respond to his son's Giant Robot the same way he might to his daughter's lumpy father's day sculpture. This will not do for Dib, who wants to impress his father more than anything in the world.

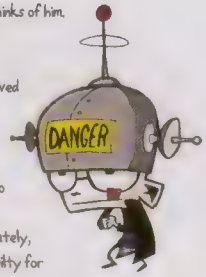
ZIM'S arrival into Dib's life provides him with exactly what is needed to trip the wires in his head, setting off his twin obsessions. His "truth is out there" fixation could find no better focus than the kid who is so obviously not from here, and yet no one but he (and a select few others) can even see the truth. And how could dad not be impressed by a son who singlehandedly exposed the evil alien threat and saved the planet from impending DOOM (what father wouldn't be proud?)?

DIB and ZIM are natural born adversaries and, probably more because of their similarities than because of their differences, rabidly competitive, constantly comparing toys and throwing infantile threats at one another.

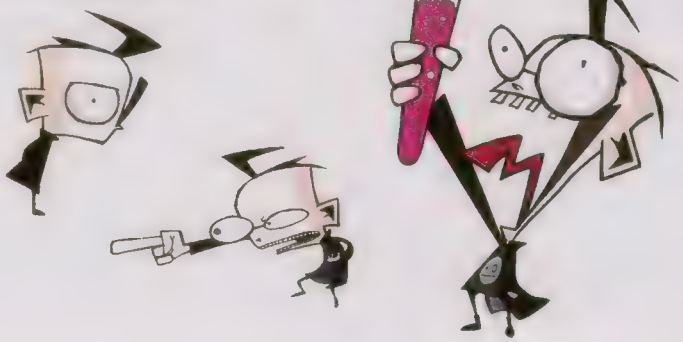
Intensely focused on things scientific, including the exposure and capture of his otherworldly neighbor, Dib has little time for anything along the lines of playground socializing, sports, and kiddie gossip, making him a pretty easy target for abuse from his classmates. With a brain capacity the size of the moon, Dib knows kids can be cruel, and just doesn't pay his detractors any mind, though, deep down just past his neck, you just know he wants to wow them all with the things he knows he is capable of.

Despite his intense nature, he's still a kid, and is ruled by curiosity which, when coupled with a mighty intellect, can get him into some pretty incredible situations where strange and terrible truths may be discovered. His response to these discoveries could easily be squealing and running like a baby. It's not that he's a chicken, it's just that, while he may spend a huge amount of time planning to get somewhere, not much thought goes into getting himself out of whatever outlandish situation he's landed into. In order to deal with some of the bullies at school, for instance, Dib might create a pair of giant robotic arms that would fit over his own arms, making him into some mutant bionic monster. The arms do the trick, as the bullies run away screaming, but then his mechanical appendages go crazy, smashing everything in sight, with Dib still strapped in and being dragged around like a puppet.

Aside from his father, Dib could care less what the world at large thinks of him. He is content with his passion for delving into the spooky world of the unexplained. Still, a guy needs an audience, a confidant of sorts, and it is here that his younger sister GAZ comes into play, whether she wants to be involved or not. In addition to her role as reluctant sidekick, Gaz also finds herself the unwitting test subject for Dib's gadgets, chemicals, and alien hunting devices. His experiments aren't the result of any ill feelings he has toward her, he does them out of necessity, not having any other place to test things out. He does feel a little guilt for the pain and embarrassment inflicted on her and tries to make up for them in various ways, but unfortunately, these "apologies" almost always involve another experiment. After feeling guilty for putting a test syrum in his sister's lunch which caused her to uncontrollably dance a merry little jig in her food , he might give her a doll. The thing is, the doll is a prototype mind reading robot which absorbs the knowledge and information about the people who touch it. The doll, of course, goes bad and ends up escaping, spouting off Gaz's deep, dark secrets to whoever will listen.

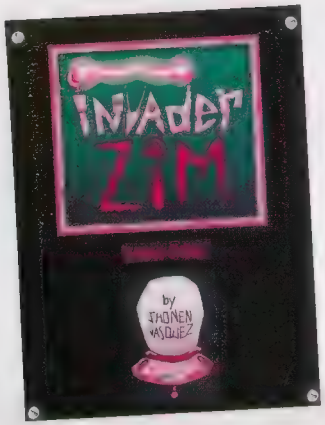


Dib is also a member of a super secret society of paranormal buffs known as the SWOLLEN EYEBALL NETWORK, which is as close to a group of his peers as he can muster. It is among their ranks that he feels most comfortable. (For more about Swollen Eyeball Network, turn to the section called Secondary Characters.) Dib has spent so much time previous to his ZIM encounter making what appear to other people to be preposterous statements about things like Bigfoot, the Loch Ness Monster, and Were-chickens and claiming to have proof of alien existence, that his singling out ZIM as an alien is not taken seriously by anyone.



This spread: Four pages from the *Invader Zim* show bible created by Jhonen that describe two of the main characters Zim and Dib in detail. The twenty-eight page bible also features descriptions of Gaz, Gir, the Robo Parents, Ms. Bitters, Professor Membrane, the Almighty Tallest, Swollen Eyeball Members, the Spooky Chihuahua (a harmless dog that creeps out Zim), and the Friends of the Purdy Saucer (a group of U.F.O.-watching morons).

Top: Additional artwork from the bible.



SAMPLE EPISODES

1.) ZIM's opportunity at redemption. Having almost completely destroyed his home planet during OPERATION: IMPENDING DOOM part I (ZIM was too small to see over the dashboard of the giant robot he was commanding), he volunteers to take on any role for the second OPERATION: IMPENDING DOOM. Not having forgotten ZIM's previous service record, the ALMIGHTY TALLEST assign him to EARTH, a planet they have no interest in. ZIM is honored and begins his mission as an intergalactic spy on the strange new world full of really mean kids, terrifying cafeteria foods, and the spooky Chihuahua. It's here that ZIM takes on his disguise as a little Earth boy, and sets up his secret lair underneath a little house. In school, he not only encounters bullies for the first time, but also the boy who will be his archenemy on Earth, Dib, with his little sister, Gaz.

2.) Dib, fresh from meeting ZIM at school, vows to unmask the mysterious new kid, and show the world, and his dad, that there is an alien amongst them. He assigns Gaz the role of assistant investigator. It's the latest in his attempts to get his dad to notice him and acknowledge his genius. He is dumbfounded by how EVERYONE else does not notice that the green boy is an alien, and tries, with increasing desperation, to prove this glaring fact through progressively elaborate means. The attempts fail, and the difficulty of his quest becomes apparent. Gaz knows ZIM is an alien, but doesn't quite respond to it with her brother's fervor.

3.) Show and tell day!! Knowing how important a good showing is to maintaining the appearance of humanity, ZIM studies like a madman all week for the coming Friday. Every second blasts the passing of seconds on the clock. Each day at school, the kids, like little goblins, ask what he'll be presenting, adding to the terror and anxiety. Finally, he finds a cute, but limp little kitty, and decides it will be a fine showing, as he feels it will make him seem like a normal little boy who loves his pet. He practices holding it, and petting it, sneezing madly all the while. Not knowing it's the cat making him so sick, he goes forth with the plan. Dib, meanwhile, plans on using his new ALIEN RADAR machine at show and tell to expose ZIM right then and there. Before he gets a chance to use it, though, ZIM , at show and tell, collapses from exhaustion in a phlegmy pool, eyes swollen, kitty still held valiantly in hand, and is dragged off and sent home. Dib frantically tries chasing ZIM to use his machine before ZIM is taken away, but is foiled by one last explosive ZIM sneeze, which destroys the radar.

4.) The dreaded Teacher-Parent night. ZIM, not having any real parents on Earth, must convert his fake, door answering robot-parents into free roaming, and speaking parent substitutes. Only having one night to prepare them, he ends up with two hideous, really crappy looking parents with glazed, stiff expressions, and limited speech capabilities. He spends the entire night freaking out and being embarrassed by MOM and DAD as they perplex, and frighten everyone. As the night progresses, the robots' bodies begin to fall apart. Dad tries some punch, almost making his head explode. Any kid can relate to being a little embarrassed by their parents, why not ZIM too?

5.) ZIM discovers that a new kid in class is an alien, like himself, another NOYNG INVADER, in fact, trying to replace ZIM on Earth. This new alien is devilishly crafty, and has no honor as a soldier. Determined to be the only alien spy on the planet, ZIM must find a way to make the new aliens' stay a miserable one. This time, ZIM actually joins forces with Dib to expose the new guy as an alien. They eventually succeed during class, and the President shows up immediately to tell the new alien invader to, " Go on, shoo. " The alien leaves. Dib takes this opportunity to try, again, to tell everyone that ZIM too is an alien, but by then the bell has rung and everyone, including the President, runs excitedly out the door.

6.) ZIM and Dib are arguing about who is the most ingenious, so they decide to settle things in a civilized, grownup way - they BATTLE IN GIANT ROBOTS. The battle is to take place at the school science fair, as the enormous robots would be less suspicious there. The huge machines actually look like hilariously goofy, bloated versions of their creators, so Dib's machine looks like a big giant Dib, and ZIM's looks like a giant ZIM. The battle is full of vicious attacks like the MIGHTY TURBO NOOGIE, and BIONIC STEAMROLLER (essentially, loud, grotesquely overblown versions of classic kid moves). Both machines are eventually destroyed. Both ZIM and Dib get must write lines on the chalkboard after school, but Dib also gets grounded. ZIM is victorious.

7.) ZIM's wig gains awareness. As a reaction to the space oils in ZIM's head, the fibers of the hairpiece become sentient, and the wig is PURE EVIL. Threatening to fly off and reveal ZIM as an alien, the wig forces his host to cater to it's every whim, and controls his every move. ZIM must destroy the life force of the wig, or be doomed to a life of servitude. The wig speaks in a James Earl Jones voice.

8.) Dib is captured and held prisoner by ZIM, who plans on conducting sinister experiments on his little P.O.W. It is up to Gaz to rescue her brother from ZIM's orbiting spaceship, before dinner, otherwise her dad won't take them to eat at Gaz's favorite restaurant, Bloaty's Pizza Hog. Gaz must journey into outer space for the big final showdown.

9.) As an allergic reaction to the combination of milk and chicken served for lunch in the school cafeteria, ZIM's head begins to swell up to alarming proportions. (Not good when trying to keep a low profile). As the school day progresses, the head grows larger, and more ponderously bulky, as ZIM tries desperately to find a cure for this new development before his presentation at the end of the day. Finally, as the school day draws to a close, ZIM walks in front of the class, his head resting upon a wheelbarrow, and tries to keep cool, until his head explodes in a messy, water balloon-like blast. This returns his head to normal size. He takes this opportunity to flee and lay low for a while.

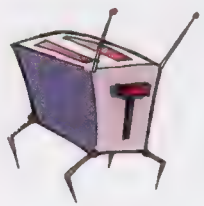
10.) Knowing that his dad HAS to spend time with the kids on his television show, Dib plots to be one of those kids, but has to make it through the strenuous and terrifying qualifications tests and trials in order to make it. There is an elimination course with many other wannabe genius kids. It's sort of an American Gladiators mentality for little kids. Very much like a Mortal Kombat format, Dib must pass through a procession of increasingly sinister and powerful kids. Cheated out of final victory, Dib decides he must take the cheating winner's place on the show before air time AT ANY COST.

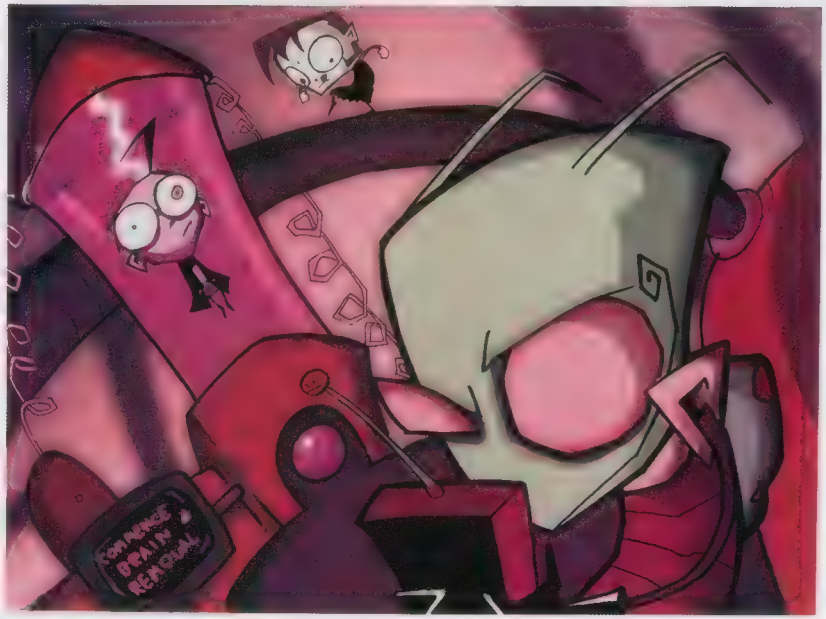
11.) In an attempt to make it easier for his alien fleet to take over Earth, ZIM creates the YAWN OF TERROR. This super yawn is spread through contact with people infected with the yawn, and intensifies each time a person yawns. Each yawn is more severe, stretching a person's head into nightmarishly gaping maws of sleepiness. The ultimate effect is a deep, deep sleep. ZIM finds that he is not immune to the YAWN of TERROR, and has to come up with an antidote, which eventually saves the rest of the world as well.

12.) ZIM and GIR travel to a distant NOYNG colony in outer space to attend a soldier progress convention where other INVADERS gather to discuss their findings, and also to check out the latest in alien spy technology. Basically, though, it's a popularity contest to see who can impress the ALMIGHTY TALLEST with their tales of bravery and dangerous encounters. Dib and Gaz, however, are the real spies here, having followed ZIM all the way to this far off alien get-together to gather more info on the extra-terrestrial threat.

13.) FOODFIGHT!! ZIM's sneaking suspicions and growing feelings of underlying dread over the course of the lunch-break are not quick enough to save him from being right in the middle of the most nightmarish foodfight in Earth history. This should be presented in a very graphic (in a culinary sort of way) war-like way, with the savage human beasts roaring like animals and launching all manners of edibles around.

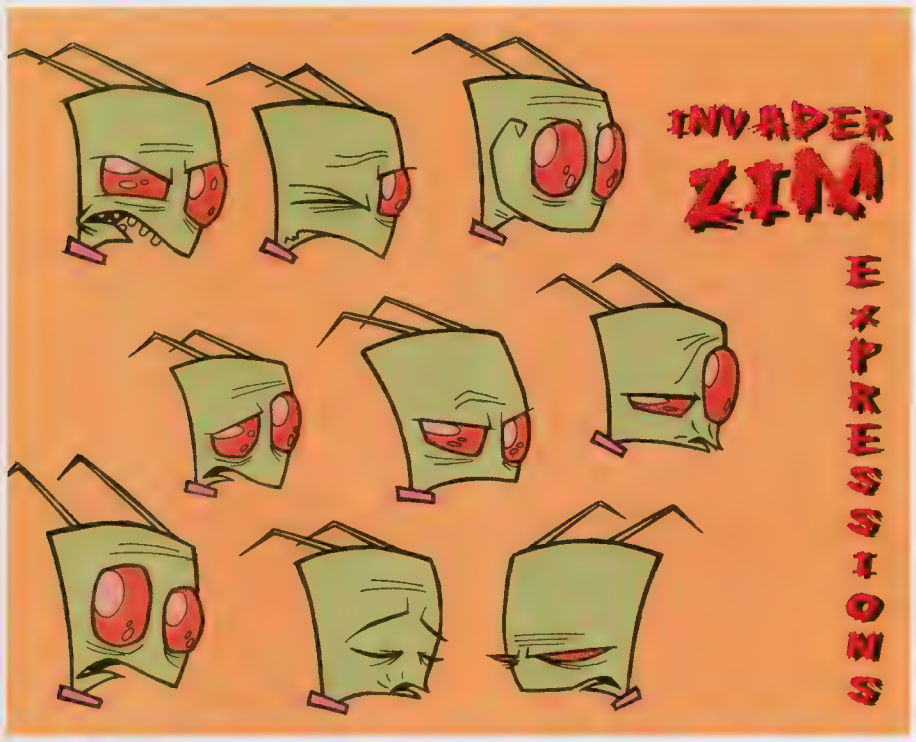
14.) ZIM decides to investigate the evil, alien eating monster that lives in an old, empty house, going on information supplied to him by G.I.R. G.I.R, feeling the pressure from his master to give some valuable news about new leads, made the monster thing up, and soon regrets it as he is dragged along with ZIM in search of this new menace to their safety. G.I.R, not wanting to be found out in his lies, decides to play the role of the monster while also trying to be by ZIMs side to convince him that the monster has been successfully destroyed.





This spread: An additional three pages from the *Invader Zim* show bible created by Jhonen that describes fourteen sample episode springboards, or brief descriptions of the core story elements, that could serve as the basis for episode scripts. Many of these springboards from the bible did inspire future *Invader Zim* series episodes.

Above: Additional art from the bible.



The proposed structure of the series was also different than how it turned out. Similar to the Fox Kids/The WB series *Animaniacs*, the original *Zim* bible outlined episodes that would have short interstitial cartoons among longer segments, as well as stories that would focus on different main characters, each taking center stage. That idea also was rejected once the series went into production to favor a two eleven-minute episode structure, mainly starring Zim.

Jhonen: The network wanted a clear main character, and they wanted it to be far more structured. I really thought it would be split down the middle–that it was a show about Zim and it was a show about Dib. It wasn't a show just about Zim, where he's got this nemesis kid that shows up every once in a while. We tried, and we got a few episodes through where it was mainly about Dib, but it was all this work to get that to happen. I was trying not to make a show with a villain and a hero; it was supposed to be more ambiguous, depending on your perspective.

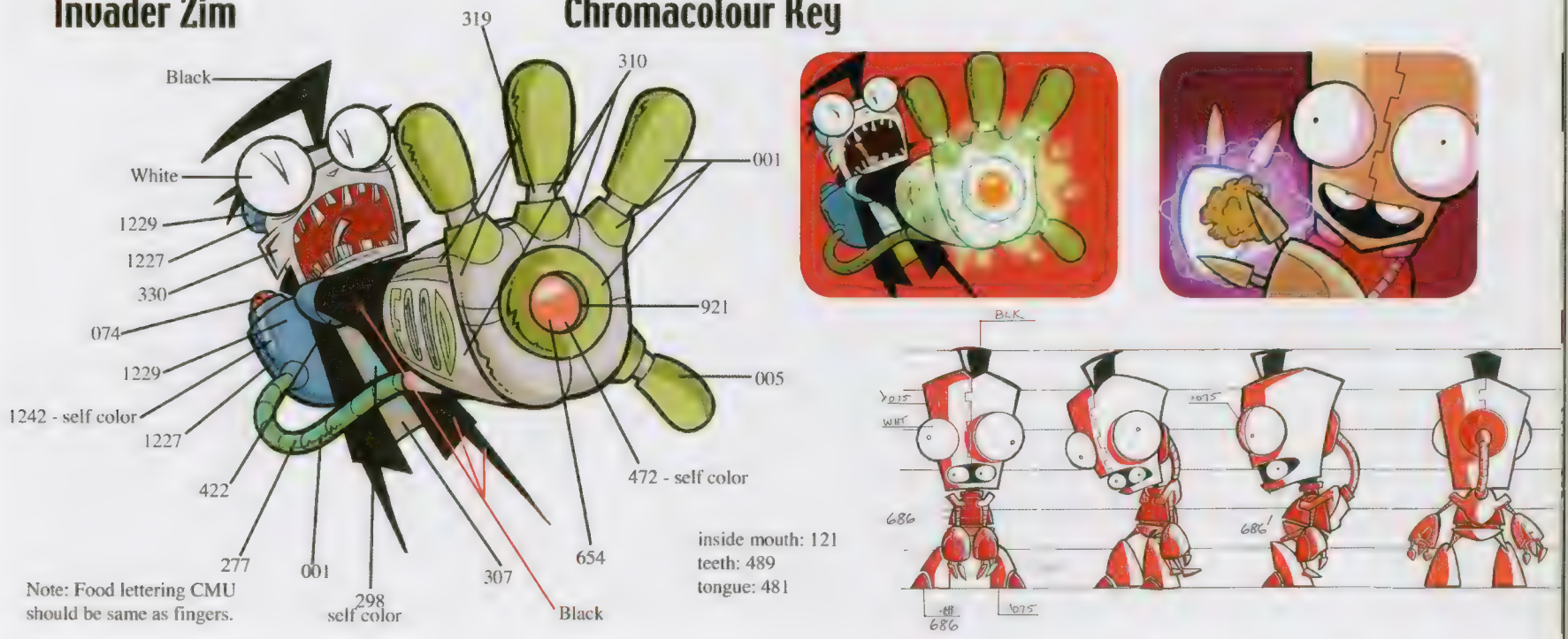
The arrangements were made to create an *Invader Zim* pilot episode at Nickelodeon Studios in Burbank, California. Jolted from his routine, Jhonen was amused to be suddenly experiencing the daily grind.

Jhonen: I was so used to just working at home and choosing my own hours. Commuting to the studio was cool at first! It was almost like play-acting. I'd find myself stuck in traffic with a ton of people and I'd just be in my car smiling to myself thinking "Haha look! I'm one of *these* people now!" It took a little while for that to wear off.

The pilot was completed in 1999. Starring Billy West (*The Ren and Stimpy Show*, *Futurama*) as Zim, the story unfolds while covering the basics of the main character relationships and the primary locations of the series: Dib is a kid who thinks that the new kid Zim is an alien; Zim is the new kid who *is* an alien; and Dib's efforts to unmask Zim and Zim's counterstrikes create escalating chaotic destruction. Gaz, Gir, and Ms. Bitters are introduced, as well as the locations of the school, Zim's secret lair, and the Membrane children's house. The full visual identity of the series wasn't completely developed by this point, but the pilot features many of the stylish elements of the subsequent series, such as the extreme camera angles and some comics-style graphics.

With the pilot complete, it was now up to the network to make a decision about whether or not to green-light a full season of initial episodes. There was focus testing.

Above: Expression model sheets from the *Invader Zim* pilot which was developed by Jhonen and produced and directed by Jordan Reichek. The models of Zim and Dib are familiar, but stray further from Jhonen's design style than the series proper.



Jhonen: There wasn't really a big moment marking the completion of the pilot. There wasn't any big celebration–it was just like, "Annnnd it's done." It was actually kind of anticlimactic and clandestine, really. It was out of my hands. There were screenings, but they were screening it to audiences of kids with wires jammed into their brains or something like that. As a creator you're not part of those things. It's just executives wearing black shrouds observing rooms full of kids. All I knew is that it was happening somewhere out there, and that it tested well enough that it could go into production.

I think the pilot, in a lot of ways, was me consciously or subconsciously trying to make a thing for kids, because it's very mild compared to the series. It's Zim and Dib, and they have a food fight. It's not what the series turned out to be. To me it is just this weird footnote that I can look at and say, "Isn't it strange that the series came from this?" Because I look at it and I can't relate to even having made it any more.

It did its job in a lot of ways. A pilot exists as not just a way of showing a network or whoever it is you're pitching to what this thing is going to be, but once you've made it, it's also something for you to look at and decide, "Do I want it to be this?" And I looked at the *Zim* pilot and was like, "Oh man, that's weak." It's fine, it's cute, it's very silly. But by the time the series had started to get developed, I stopped thinking in terms of the audience. I do my best stuff when I'm just having fun, and I'm not trying to think about making the perfect thing–I'm just trying to make the thing that keeps me interested as I'm working on it.

Zim is kind of like my comics: a mess of terrible ideas alongside things that turned out to work, and it kind of has a personality. It's not engineered. My favorite stuff out there in the world is the work where I really feel the presence of the creator, or a personality of the people working on a show, and that is what *Zim* turned out to be. I watch the series now and I'm like, "Holy crap, why did we do that? That's horrible!" and then there's other stuff where I'm like, "My God, I can't believe that worked." I never approached the series thinking, "What's going to work?" or studying and focus-testing–it just kind of came out of, "Wouldn't it be dumb if we tried this?" and we'd try it!

I like to think of my favorite stuff as an interesting mix of hits and misses. Like your friends, the people that you like. Like, *people.* Versus a *product.* They are flawed. But you keep coming back to them.

In a lot of ways, I feel like if we had made a show that was *more* like the pilot we could have

Above: Additional model sheets and two stills from the pilot episode, one of which shows the featured color key in action with additional special effects layered onto the food-launcher glove.

been more successful, at least commercially. That's a cynical way of looking at stuff. The pilot was bland enough to succeed.

Team Zim, Assemble!

After the pilot's successful pitch to the network in 1999, the *Zim* production set about hiring a full crew. Jhonen was barely into his twenties, with no studio experience to speak of. It isn't unusual to pair an experienced artist with a series creator, and Nickelodeon brought on Steve Ressel, ex–Klasky Csupo creative, to be the showrunner. Along with Steve, a gang of additional Klasky-ites followed his lead to *Zim* when the word spread about Nickelodeon's new show staffing up.

Mary: It was very easy for me to staff *Zim*. Because of Jhonen's artwork, there were so many people that wanted to work on the show.

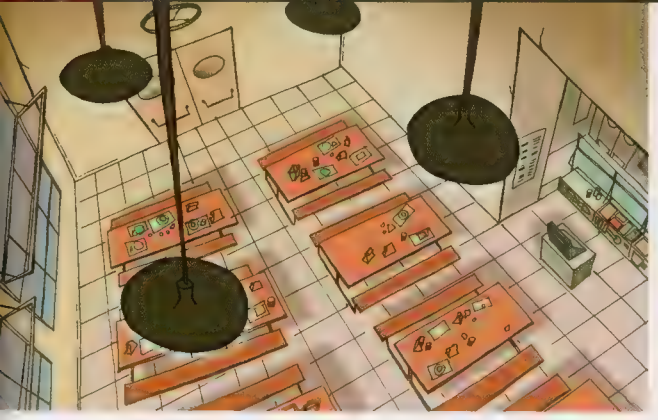
Jhonen: There were sort of two camps in the crew, initially: the Klasky Csupo contingent, and then there was the rest of the crew that I had plucked from a bunch of other places–Bryan Konietzko, and Aaron Alexovich, who we found at CalArts.

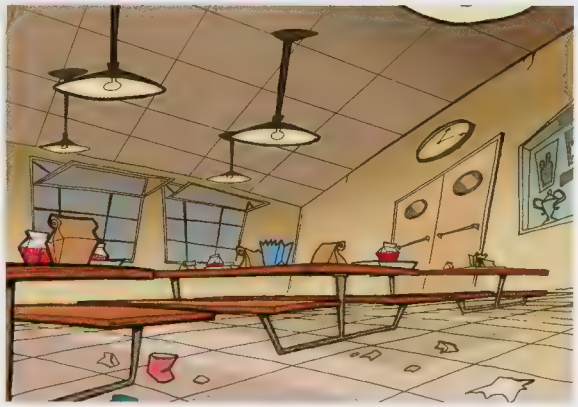
Aaron Alexovich [character designer]: I didn't know Jhonen before, which is funny, because our styles are very similar. Going way back, I was at CalArts for about three years. My second year there, I go out to a comic shop with my friend Pete Browngardt–who went on to create *Uncle Grandpa*–and he said, "There's a comic here that I know you're going to like." He puts it in my hand, and it's *Johnny the Homicidal Maniac*. I'm looking at this thing and I'm like, "Did I make this myself in some kind of fugue state? [*laughs*] Did I wake up in the middle of the night and make this comic?" Because it was all stuff I love. It was that H. R. Giger influence I love, that spooky but kind of cute, comedy deal. It felt like it came out of my own brain, which was so strange. I was totally into it.

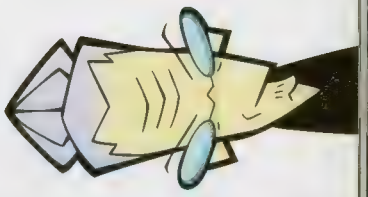
Then, a year later, I'm still at CalArts and I find out that Jhonen has a project going at Nickelodeon. And so I'm thinking, "I'd like to work with this guy." Never had met him. So I sent him an email. This was back in the day when you just throw an email out into the ether and see what happens, and I never hear anything back. Nothing happens.

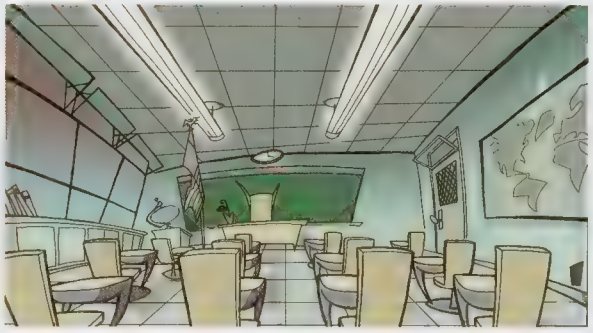
But then, toward the end of my CalArts career, more than three years into it, I had done this film called *Good Guys Wear Black*. It's about this witch, and she's got a boogeyman in her closet, and it's very much my spooky-cute

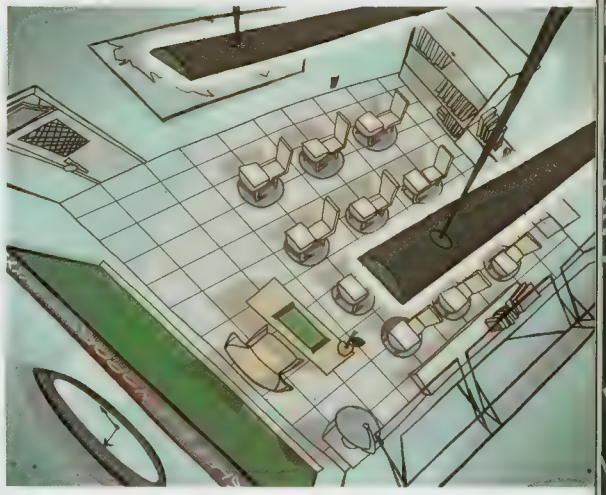
This spread: Background artwork from the *Invader Zim* pilot episode. The art features the familiar dramatic camera angles found in the series. The pilot's versions of the Skool cafeteria and classroom lack a few layers of filthy decay that are found in the series versions.











style. And there was a big year-end show at CalArts where they show off all the films that the faculty thought were best [the CalArts Character Animation Producers' Show], and Jhonen was there. Another friend of mine had brought him to the show.

Then I get a call a few days later from this friend who says, "Do you want to come into Nickelodeon and talk to my friend, who's a creator on a show?" And I said, "Okay,"–I needed a job–and it turned out to be Jhonen. It turned out that he had never read that email. [*laughs*] He didn't read that email until I had actually been working on the show for a year. He had this backlog of emails. *Johnny* was riding high at the time, and he was getting a ton of fan mail. So a year later at the studio he was like, "Yeah, I just got an email from you."

Rikki Simons initially met Jhonen through the comics world at APE. After that, they began collaborating, and he helped color one of Jhonen's comics.

Rikki Simons [colorist, voice of Gir]: I was living with Jhonen for twenty days helping him color *I Feel Sick*, and he was having a hard time finding a voice for Gir. He started hinting that Gir kind of had some of my qualities. I asked him if he wanted me to audition for it, he said, "I guess you couldn't screw it up more than anyone else." So I got it.

Jhonen: Casting was pretty intense. I had known Rikki forever, and Rikki has always had a funny voice. I had gotten sick of the auditions for Gir. There were certain things at the time that were just really miserable: trying to cast robots and little girls, like Gaz. There were people who would come in–they were professionals and they had worked in voice acting forever–and there's just these go-to, stock performances. So you would get the robot voice "I AM A ROBOT" [*monotone, stilted affectation*], and for the girl characters, you would get these cute, plucky voices that were just cloying and horrible that I didn't want. I just wanted people's personalities and not them putting on a show. It was a weird request at the time. Not so much now that we've seen the rise of Adult Swim where the vocal performances are just like, "Guys talking with low energy" [*said in a relaxed, conversational tone*], which works great.

Rikki didn't sound like anyone else. He wasn't a professional–in any way. [*laughs*] Completely untrained, perfect for Gir, and there was only a

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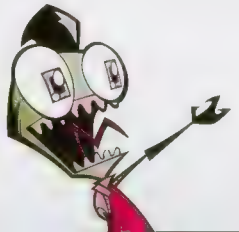

INVADER ZIM

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Scene / Panel A / Timing / BG

Scene / Panel B / Timing / BG

Scene / Panel C / Timing / BG

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INVADER ZIM

Page

Scene / Panel A / Timing / BG

Scene / Panel A / Timing / BG

Scene / Panel B / Timing / BG

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INVADER ZIM

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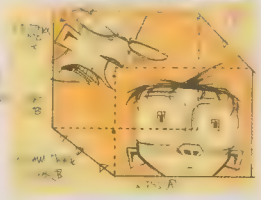

INVADER ZIM

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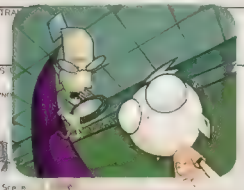

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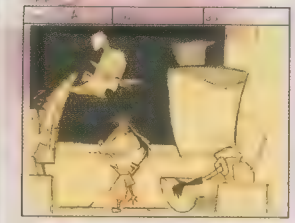

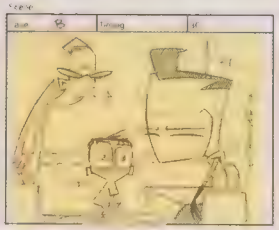

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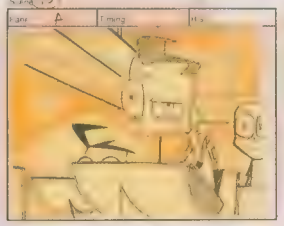

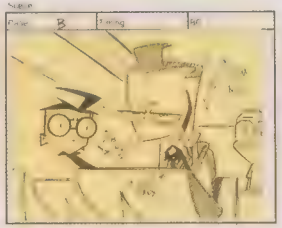

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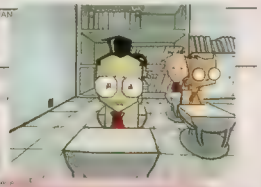

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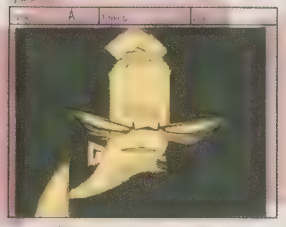

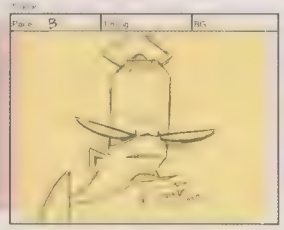

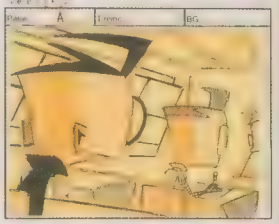

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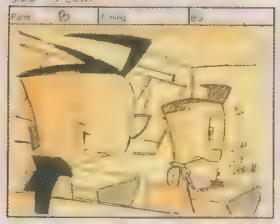

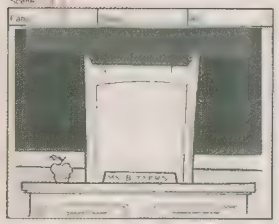

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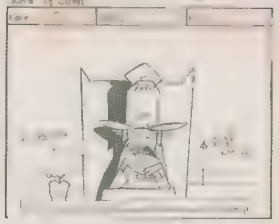

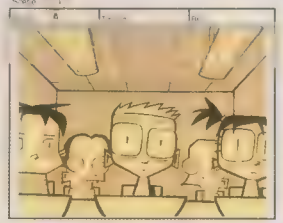

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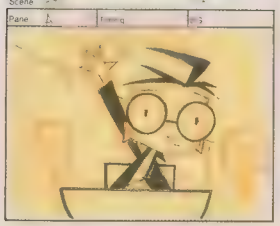

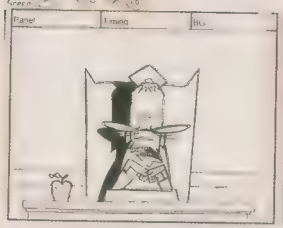

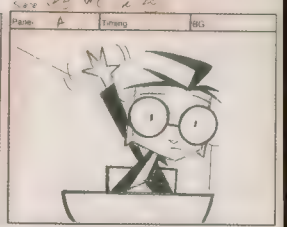

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INVADER ZIM

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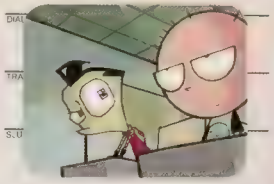
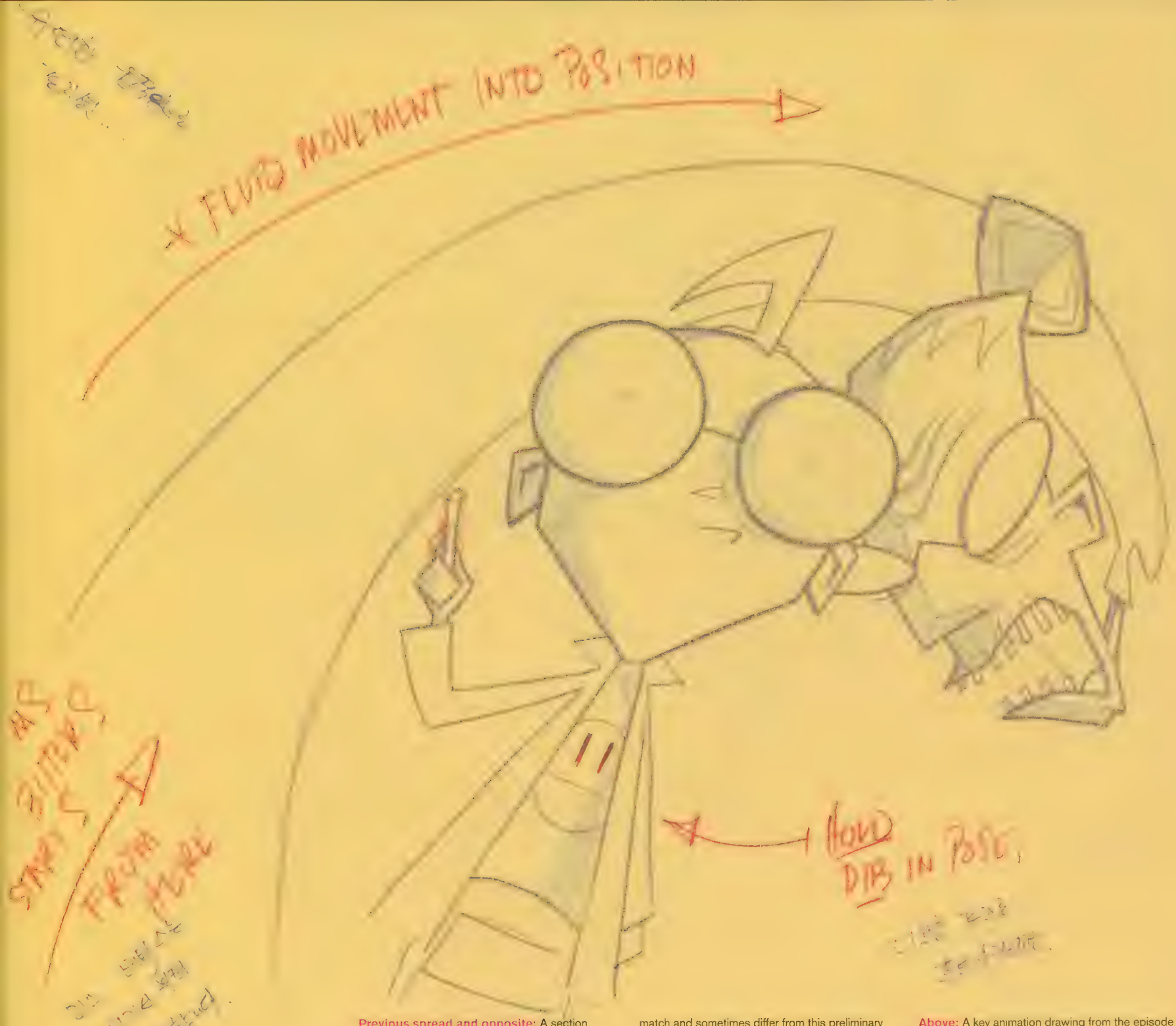
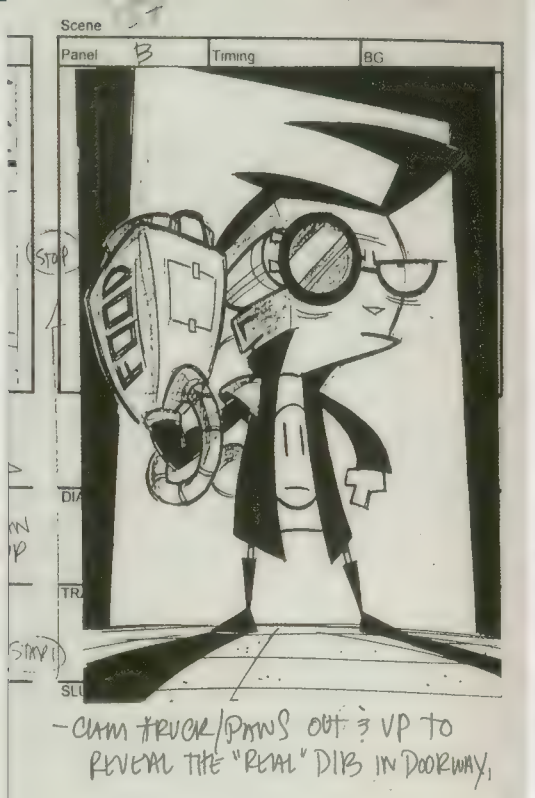
INVADER ZIM

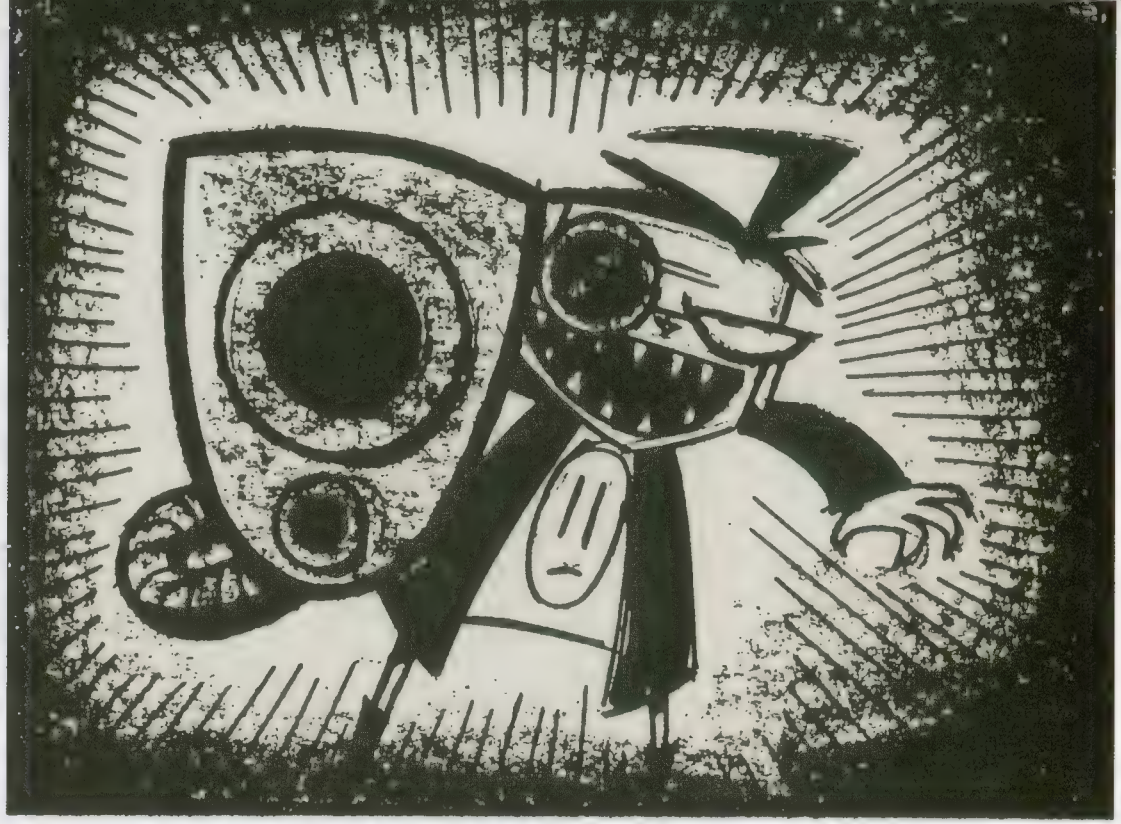




Previous spread and opposite: A section of the pilot episode's storyboards along with a selection of stills from the episode that sometimes match and sometimes differ from this preliminary visual storytelling tool.

Above: A key animation drawing from the episode with notes on the movement.





certain amount of directing that you could give him. You could very specifically say, "Okay, now read it more like this," and somewhere between your mouth and his ears, the directions, just who knows what happened to them. He would just do some insane, upsetting thing where you're like, "Why did you . . . that's not at all like . . ."—but it was perfect for Gir! Because his reactions are mystifying! And scary sometimes. Completely inappropriate.

There were reads where it would sound like Rikki was actually hurting himself. That's not training . . . that's Rikki. That's a person being himself and being perfect for the character.

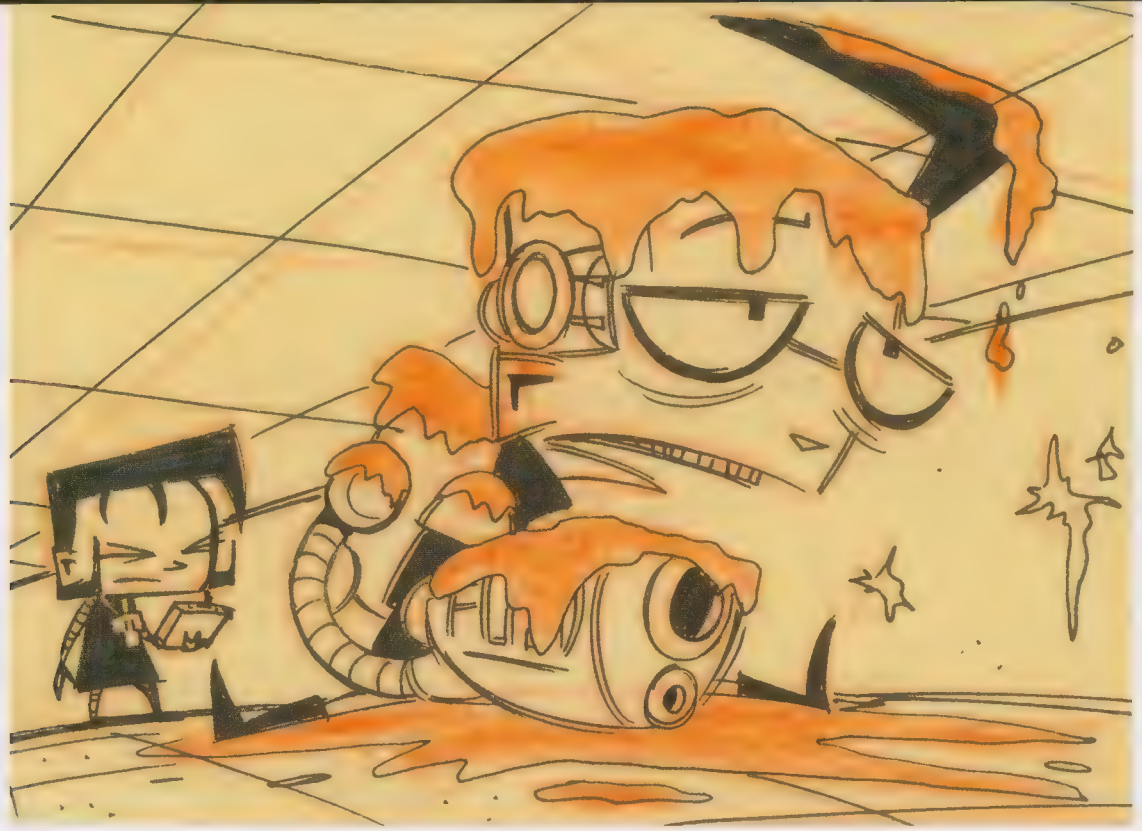
Finding the voice of Zim was the primary hurdle. Voice actor Billy West had handled Zim's performance in the pilot, but Jhonen wanted to go in a new direction with his main character for the series.

Jhonen: For the *Zim* series casting, Billy was one of the people who did a pass at Zim. The thing about Billy—he did *Ren and Stimpy*, he's Fry on *Futurama*, so he was already really well established. Mark Hamill also took a stab at it, and you know, he was voicing the Joker. These were all people who I thought were great, but they weren't my first choice, not because I didn't like them, but they were more the network's idea. They wanted to go very established, a safer bet. I just wanted someone who would always be associated with *Invader Zim*. Even though Richard [voice actor Richard Steven Horvitz] had done *Angry Beavers*, I felt that we could get something out of him that was going to be a lot more recognizable as Zim.

I remember Richard being the hardest one to get on to the series because casting thought his audition was still too close to the character that he played on *Angry Beavers*, Daggat. I kept at it, and eventually I won out on that. Everyone else eventually realized, "Why are we fighting? This is great." I knew this was the guy. He's perfect.

Richard would just go for it. He's incredible to play around with. You know, you need people to completely forget the concept of dignity. You need people who can just play, the way that they did when they were little kids. Having Richard around always reminds me of why this all is fun. It's great to have partners in crime. People who get it. You're just a couple of people goofing around, and it's not work! It's kind of amazing.

The crew at large that came together was young and hungry for some creative muscle-flexing. It was an



ambitious group, many of whom went on to major entertainment world achievements, notably Bryan Konietzko, who would go on to create Nickelodeon shows *Avatar: The Last Airbender* and *The Legend of Korra*.

Bryan Konietzko [storyboard artist, art director]: It was still early in my career, and I was coming off a couple prime-time animated series, which were creatively stifling environments. In those types of productions, a room full of writers/producers on the other side of town dictated everything, and the art and animation crews were just expected to follow orders. As a result, I often didn't feel much like an artist, or like I could get more than one or two of my own visual ideas into an episode. Then I joined the *Zim* production, and it was the complete opposite.

Many of the cartoons of the 1980s were essentially commercials, written and produced by teams that needed tight control over how their toy-based characters and brands were depicted. Among some Hollywood animation crews who had to work in this uninspiring environment, the animation writer and his scripts became the boogeyman, a symbol of this creative repression from above—from parties who didn't understand and/or didn't respect the medium and its potential. *Zim*, though scripted before being storyboarded, was an example of a scripted show that allowed the leeway for storyboard artists to contribute creatively.

Jhonen: I don't know how much we deviated from how things were typically done because *Zim* was still very heavily script-driven. Writing was the first chance for me to have fun. I loved the early days of being able to just write whatever I wanted, not really caring if it was acceptable or not.

Bringing in the board artists was the second opportunity to have fun, and letting the board artist know that they should just try stuff. Letting them know that they could just do whatever they wanted. Then they would push things further and there was a lot of room to interpret the jokes at that point.

Jhonen's managerial approach proved that it was not so much the fact that a show was scripted or not that determined whether a crew felt valued and inspired to contribute their best work.

Bryan: Before I was art directing on *Zim*, I was drawing storyboards, and in that department we were

This spread: Selected drawings from the pilot episode storyboard featuring Dib.

encouraged to run wild. We were all trying to take advantage of a rare opportunity, generating the most over-the-top action scenes and absurdist humor we could cram into eleven-minute chunks. A legendary example was Kyle Menke turning one sentence in a script—I think it simply read, "And then there is a chase."—into two hundred storyboard pages. No one else could draw as fast as Kyle, especially not me, so most of us other storyboard artists were working very long hours—not because anyone was forcing us to, but because it was so inspiring to have so much creative liberty.

Perhaps because of their youthful bravado—or their fashion-forward clothes, their late-night gaming sessions, or the matte-black spray-painted ornaments on their crew Christmas tree—the group earned a reputation over in their corner of the studio floor. Their nearest adjacent studio-mates were, after all, the crew of *Dora the Explorer*.

Jhonen: We never really had much interaction with the other productions. When we finished our first twenty-two-minute episode, there was a screening of all the stuff that had just been completed at the studio. And *Dora* was one of them, and there was another show called *Oswald*, and those were both Nick Jr. shows. And all three crews were gathered in what was kind of just a big gym here at the studio. They showed *Dora the Explorer*, and it was adorable. They showed *Oswald*, and it was super cute. These were people that were laughing and giggling at Dora and Oswald, and then they showed *Zim*, this horrible, screaming green thing. You could feel the crowd just kind of recognizing that something was wrong. [*laughs*] But we thought it was hilarious.

The *Zim* crew was happy to fill the role of the local studio rebels (or oddities) by virtue of producing work with such relative creative leeway.

Louie del Carmen [storyboard supervisor]: Everyone took ownership of the show and brought a little piece of what it was that was inspiring them at them time. Anime was big, video games were big, science fiction was big, and at the time, all this new media was burgeoning—there was excitement that all this cool stuff was going to be at your fingertips. I think everybody had a chip on their shoulder. They wanted to make a cool show that was different, that was going to knock people's socks off.

Since the earliest days of television animation, frugality has been a priority. Generally, both the budget and

schedule imposed on animated productions are the primary factors that limit the amount of knocking off of one's socks that the typical crew can achieve. Any extra enhancement that can be squeezed out of the scenario usually is the result of crew members working their tails off—perhaps more than is reasonable. This was the case on *Zim*.

Jhonen: To get the cinematic look that we wanted for *Zim* required a lot more work than getting a typical made-for-TV look, which would have been a flatter, sitcom, Sunday funnies–type approach. If I got my way, every other line of dialog would have its own shot and angle to amplify that moment, and that stuff really adds up. It starts to kill storyboard artists and animators–it's just a lot of work. Each new shot needs a new background, the background has to look good, the characters have to be drawn correctly, and so on.

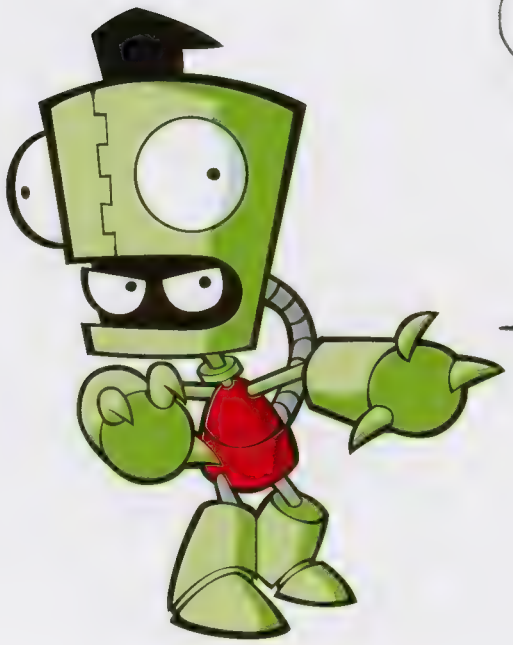
Each *Zim* episode began its life in the Burbank studio, but the production process included outsourcing the actual drawing of character animation to a studio on the other side of the globe. What took place in the states was considered preproduction (the writing, character, and background design; storyboarding; music; and voice-acting), and postproduction (final editing and sound mixing). This is still typical today for many U.S. television animation productions, whose work is completed in South Korea, Canada, or anywhere with a favorable cost of doing business.

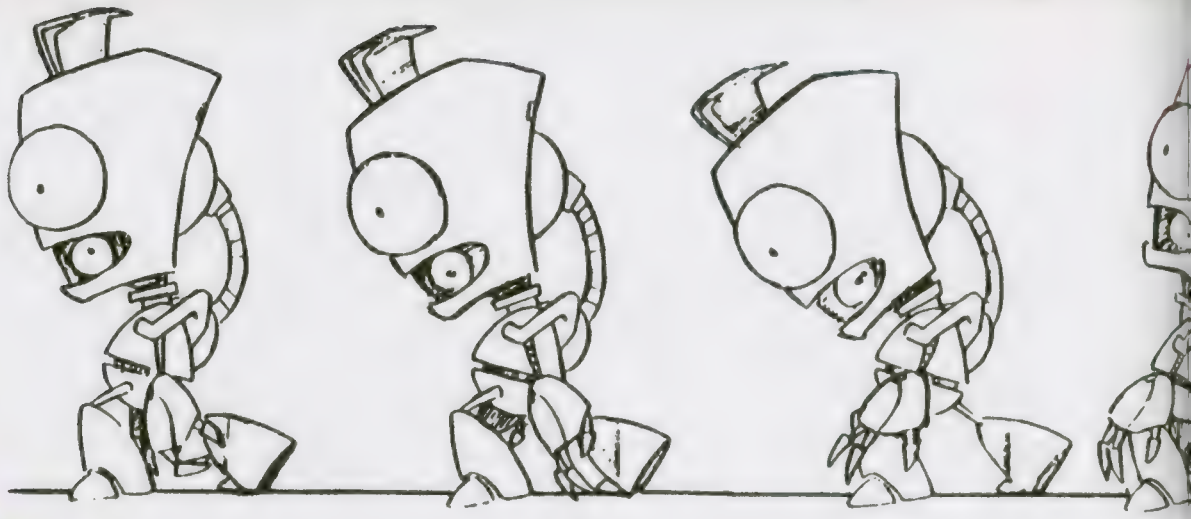
For its largely green crew, *Zim* was also a training ground in this international production process.

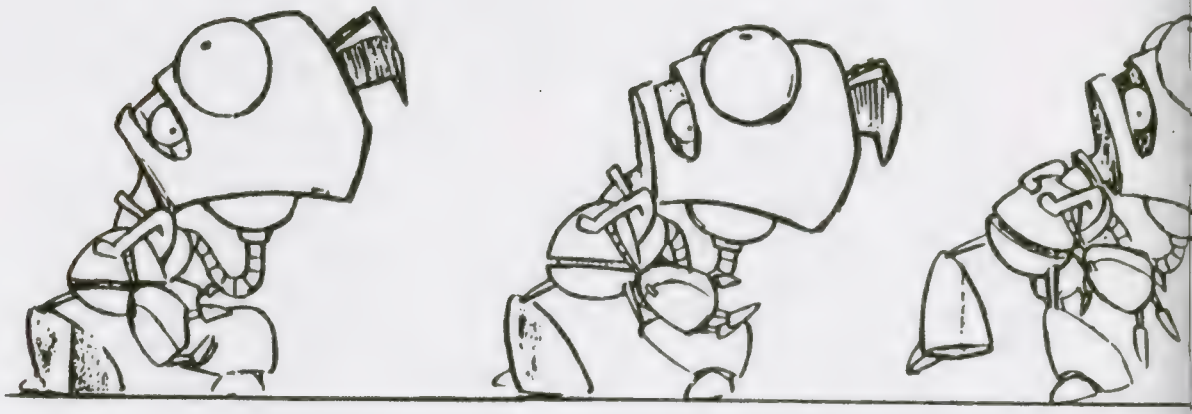
Bryan: Working on *Zim* was brutal. But it was also, more importantly, the most creative thing I had ever been a part of up to that point, and it trained and prepared me in ways that fed directly into subsequently cocreating and showrunning my own series.

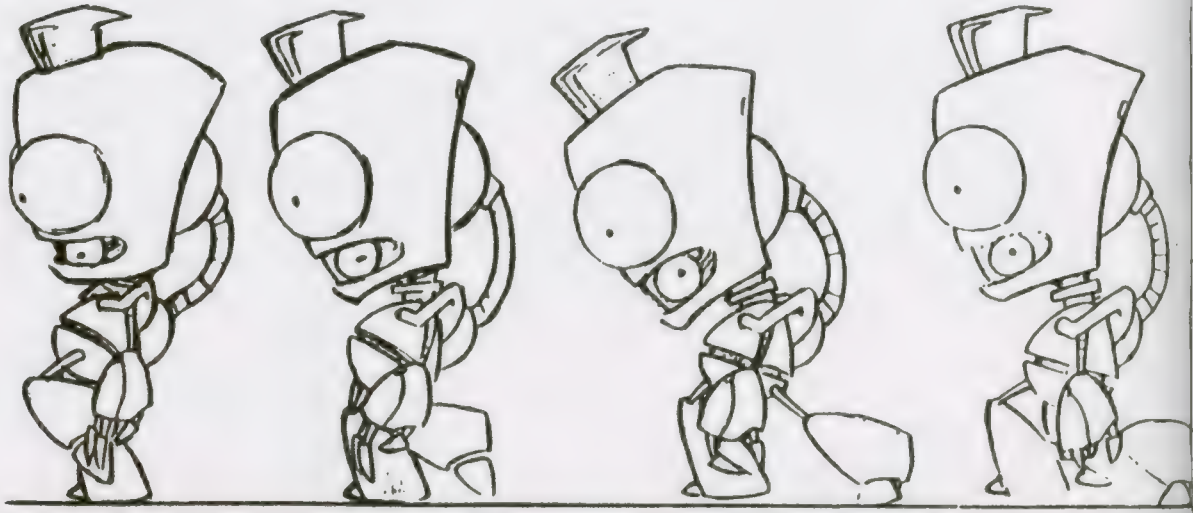
One of the opportunities it afforded me was a three-week trip to Seoul, South Korea, when I was twenty-four years old, to train the animation crews in drawing Jhonen's style. It was an awesome experience to work with the artists there and learn more about the overseas production pipeline–something I had wondered about a lot since starting in TV animation. I did my best to understand the challenges they faced, and to see what we could do stateside to help them make better, more on-model animation on a tight TV schedule. After the trip, I compiled a huge binder of overlays I drew on top of their

This spread: Animation drawings and clean-up pencil drawings from the pilot episode which illustrate how the signature thick line around the characters was achieved. When drawn at this scale, artists needed to draw a double pencil line for the thick outlines, which would be inked in solid black.





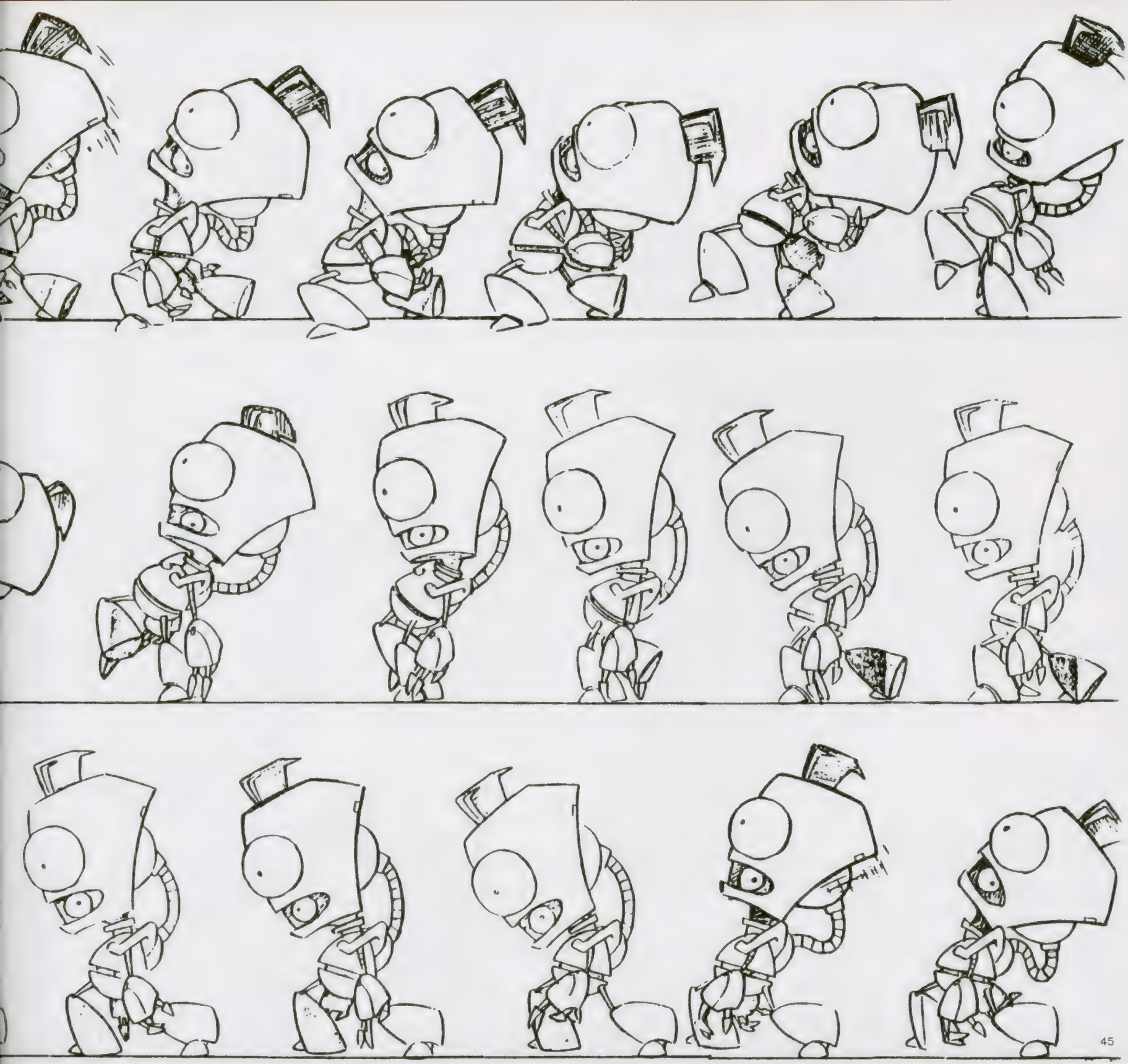




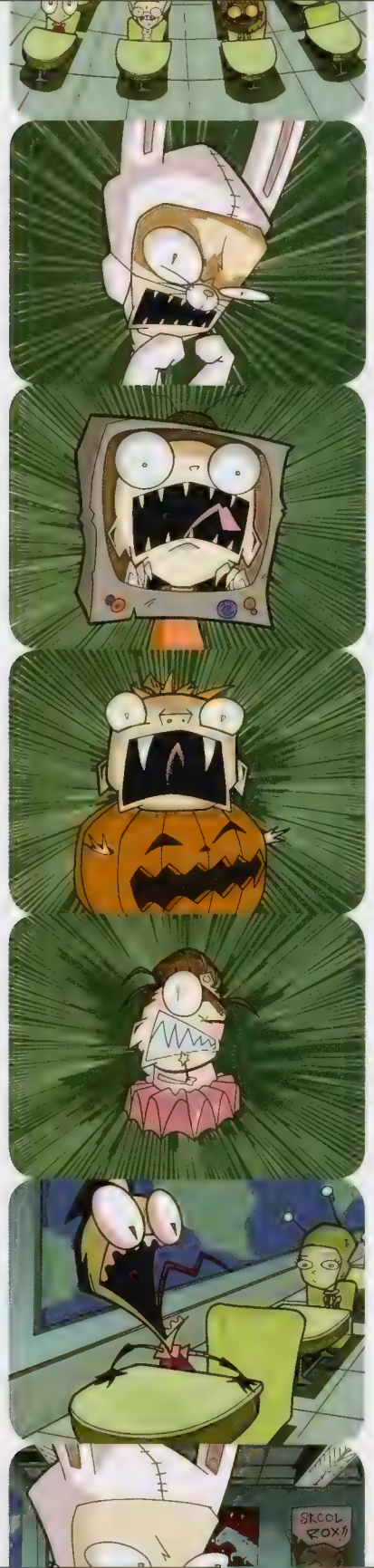
layouts, which ended up serving as a sort of style guide. Later, I took everything I learned from that trip and applied it to how we set up the production on *Avatar: The Last Airbender*, particularly in how we collaborated with the South Korean animators. I don't know that I could have asked for a better animation boot camp than the *Zim* production, even if working on it took a couple years off my life!

A whirlwind production with late nights and intense workloads—often self-imposed and self-inflicted through exuberant creative choices—*Zim* was a novel, formative experience. The kind of thing that leaves a mark.

This spread: An animation walk cycle from the series pilot featuring Zim in his robotic armor.



ALIEN
VAMPIRE



2: ZIM, THE INVADER EARTH DESERVES

WRITING AND DESIGNING THE CHARACTERS OF ZIM

Earth is a world filled to the brink with madness—especially for children. When not locked up at the Crazy House for Boys, children attend Skool, where they are subject to Poop Cola–sponsored educational films, desks made of trash (due to budget cuts), and organ harvesting from their resident space alien. Zim's presence makes so little of a splash in this dystopian hellscape, it's as if he has fulfilled a role that was waiting for him. The herd needed to be thinned. Earth had been awaiting an overconfident invader from Irk.

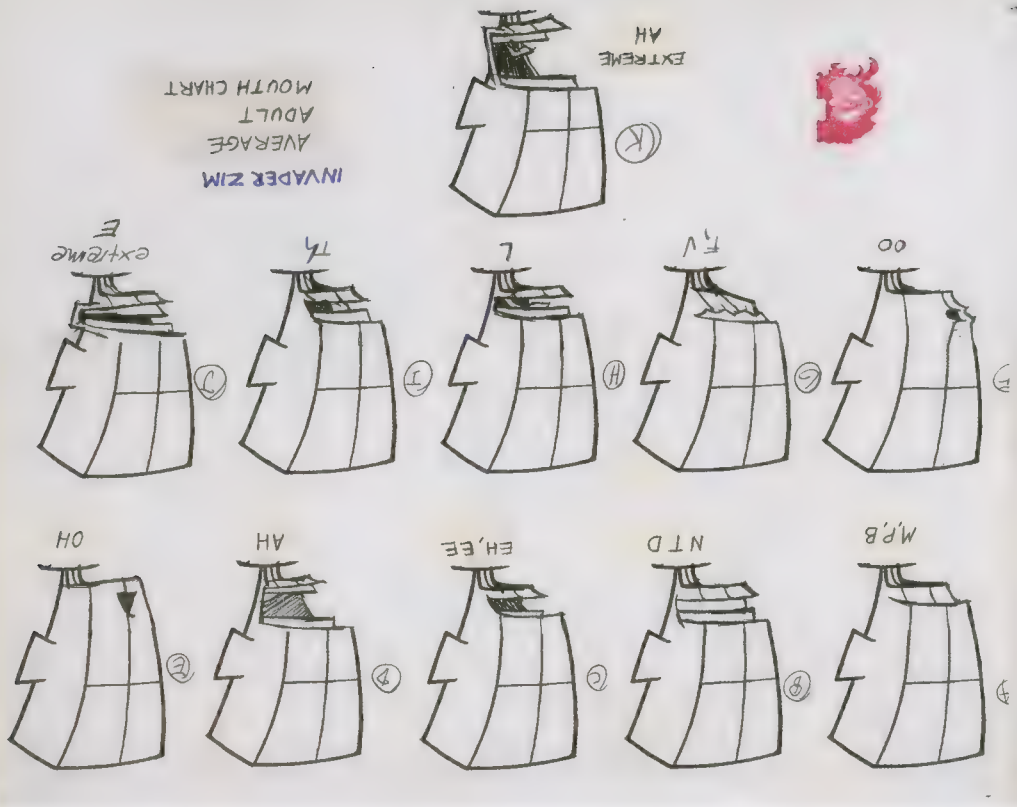
Molding Characters

Character personalities, the relationships among them, and their visual designs are each important parts of the *Zim* whole.

The *Zim* cast is designed with thick, inky black line art—thicker than the average animated cartoon. Accentuating the line pushes the design of the characters toward a graphic flatness, though they are constructed with dimensional forms underneath. The dark and drab color schemes, punctuated by olive, fuchsia, and bloody reds, make a statement about the mood: darkness and unease lie ahead. The style source is clearly Jhonen's artwork, but the system and guides created to synchronize the preproduction team in Burbank and the animation production studio in Seoul, South Korea, is an effort developed by many artists.

Aaron Alexovich [character designer]: A lot of the line treatments we had in *Zim* were influenced by comics: that heavy outline with a lot of little noodly details within. We didn't keep things simple, that's for sure. Jhonen wasn't conforming his style to the constraints of animation, which was difficult for some people but also led to some visual inventiveness, in trying to solve this puzzle that he was insisting that we solve.

This spread: Jhonen's designs for promotional artwork for the episode "Halloween Spectacular of Spooky Doom" (EP14), and stills from the opening moments of the episode where Zim realizes his deathly fear of costumed children.



Jhonen Vasquez [series creator]: I don't know if that's part of the answer to breaking through the usual tedium–just to bring in more people who don't know what they're doing, [*laughs*] because that can go horribly wrong. But yeah, I didn't come from animation. I didn't come in knowing what works, what doesn't work, what people like. I was blessed with a certain element of Zim's own obliviousness. [*laughs*] That's where a lot of the character comes from, being kind of aware how beneficial it is to not know anything.

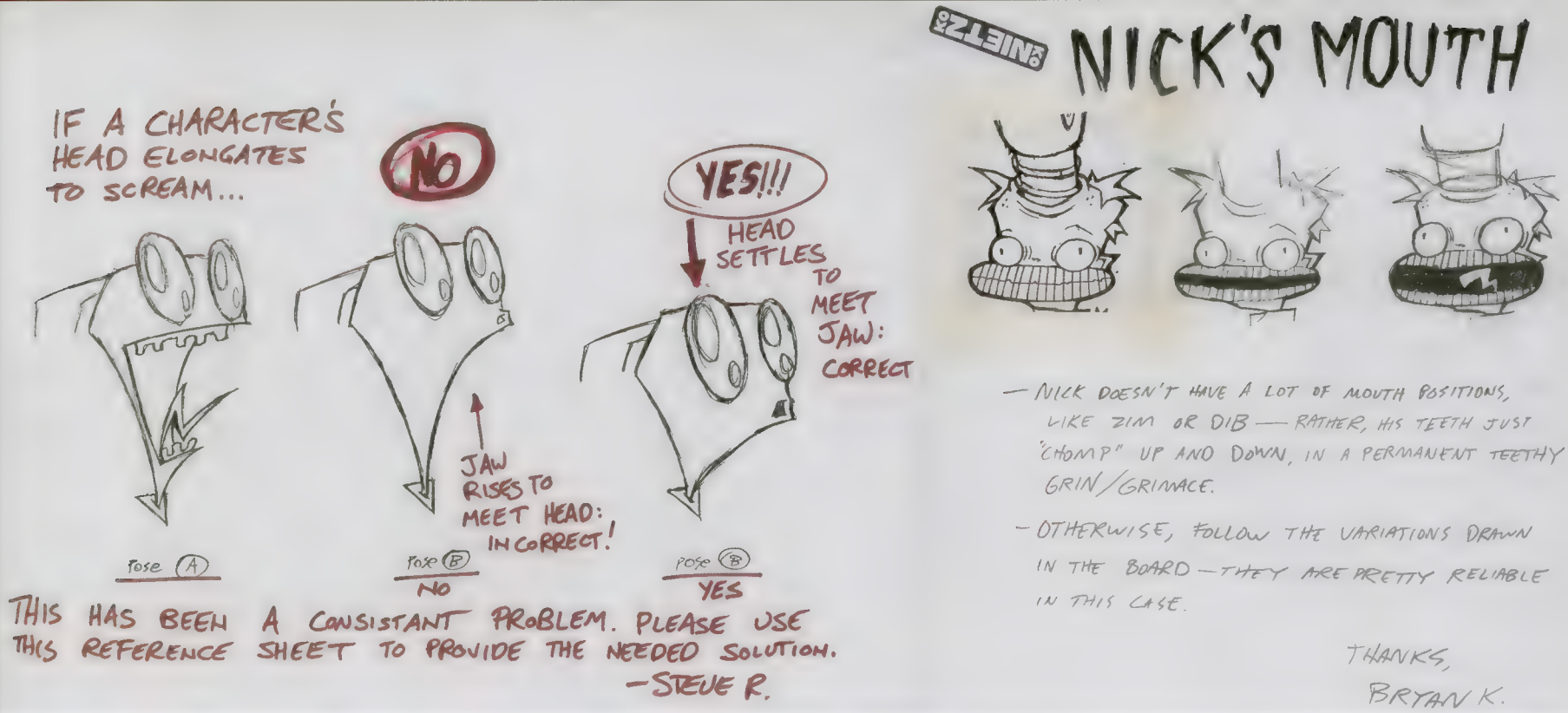
At the time I was developing *Zim*, I was really unhappy with this visual school in animation where things were all sort of looking the same. You get that every couple of years; there's a look that takes over, and at the time it was this retro UPA look. [The United Productions of America studio, active from the 1940s through the 1970s, was an innovator in stylish limited theatrical and television animation with a modern design flair.] It was *Dexter's Lab*, it was *Powerpuff Girls*, it was *Fairly OddParents*, it was *My Life as a Teenage Robot*–just what my brain at the time thought of as retro. And so I was like, "TO THE FUTURE! Everything should look like it's never existed before!" I didn't want to see people my age going, "Here's my take on this thing that's already happened." This stylistic conformity upset me, even if it was used on shows that I liked.

So there was a certain pride in having come from a complete lack of training, because to me, that is what training did to people–"Draw like this or you can't have a show." But now I'm jealous of those people because they know how to draw better than me, at least on a technical level. [*laughs*] I can only draw like me.

When it comes to form, the *Zim* designs exist in a hybrid space between flat graphic flair and round, dimensional objects that can be rotated smoothly and realistically across 360 degrees, like a 3-D model. The model packs illustrate volumetric forms that are the base for each character's head. The intention is that artists will use these constructed forms when drawing the characters from all sorts of cinematic angles, with additional detail wrapped on to those forms.

The characters have full turn-around model sheets and can be drawn from most angles, with some graphic eccentricities—such as Gaz's hair—looking correct from each key angle but proving difficult to draw for in-between poses. Any artist who has ever tried to draw rotations of Beavis or Butt-Head, or a simple picture of Phineas or Ferb front-facing the camera, can appreciate that each funky cartoon design has its limitations and peculiarities. For more examples, see any cartoon produced by

Above: Some of the underlying structure in the designs of the "average adult mouth chart" and Zim himself.



Nickelodeon stalwart Klasky Csupo. This type of stylish 2-D cartoon design is typical in television animation as it is in independent films, where individual style is a virtue.

Aaron Alexovich began work on the series as assistant character designer, then soon graduated to character designer. His own work's qualities dovetailed with Jhonen's perfectly. Many of the beings in *Zim* straddle a line between cute and grotesque, or even hopscotch back and forth during one of many body transformations that the characters often endure: Sometimes they are cute, sometimes they suffer miserably.

Aaron: I'm just going to go ahead and say it: We're kind of in the Tim Burton world, where it's funny but it goes right up to this horrible little edge, and it almost falls off into being disturbing. Playing with that line is really fun for me.

I guess maybe there's just something extra-disturbing about seeing horrible things happen to something that's really delightful, really cute. It intensifies the horror of it, and I really like that.

There's this artist that Jhonen and I both really love, Junji Ito. His comics will have these ideas that, if I were to describe them to you, you'd just laugh because they sound so silly, but the way he's drawn them, they're just absolutely horrifying.

Jhonen: I think of it as the horror is the comedy and the comedy is the horror. For me, I've always loved comedy as horror. The best horror, if you describe the scenario, is inherently absurd–some of the scariest stuff in the world sounds like a joke. When we were kids my brother and I would watch horror movies, and we would laugh, but at night, I would think about these horror movies and I'd be freaking out. It was just an incredible combination of emotions and physical and mental responses. I can't say that I understand the psychology behind it, but it fascinates me. It goes back to how I wanted to put these things in *Zim*. The things that are scary, I wanted them to actually be scary. I didn't want it to be kid-scary, I didn't want it to be cute-scary.

Main Characters

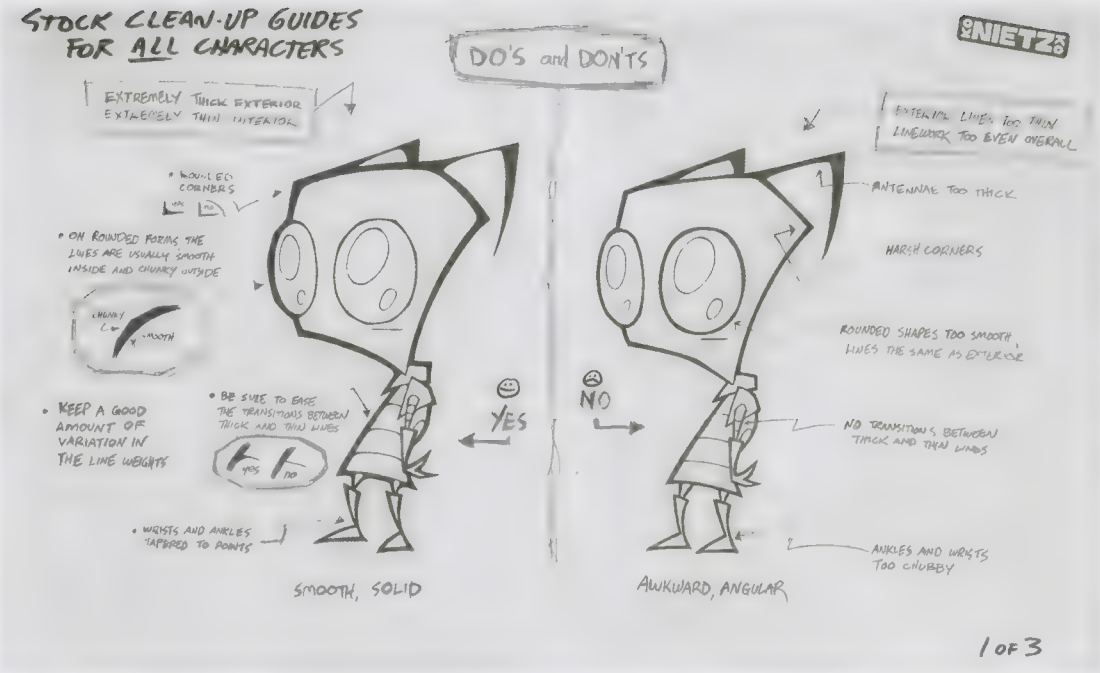
The psyches of *Zim*'s main characters churn in a potpourri of pride, vengeance, desire, and cruelty. The cast includes a gleeful would-be conqueror (Zim), a neglectful celebrity parent (Professor Membrane), a soul-crushing, shape-shifting teacher (Ms. Bitters), and more! The interactions of the personalities create a delightful

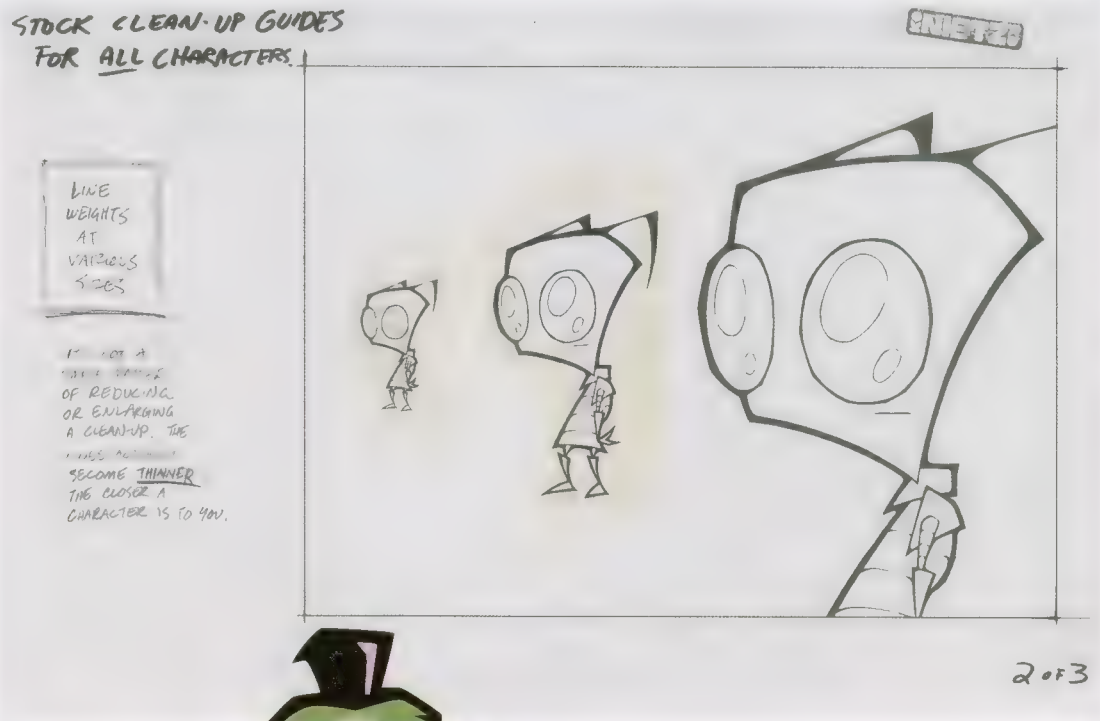
Above: Animation notes by director Steve Ressel and art director Bryan Konietzko.

DEREK—

JHONEN IS STILL VERY CONCERNED WITH THE INCONSISTENCY OF THE CLEAN-UP LINE WEIGHT AND QUALITY. ALL OF AARON'S MODEL SHEETS ARE A GREAT GUIDE, BUT I HAD HIM DRAW UP THESE 3 SHEETS AS THE DEFINITIVE STANDARD. PLEASE DISTRIBUTE THESE TO EACH ARTIST OF EACH CLEAN UP TEAM, AND EXPLAIN THE IMPORTANCE OF FOLLOWING THEM. THANKS—
YOU'RE FIRED!

—BRYAN
NIETZ

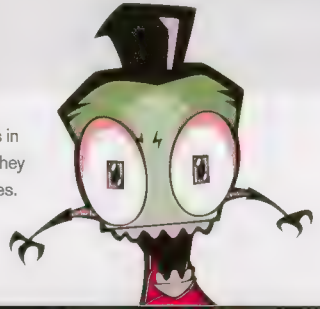




concoction of caustic bile splashing around in horrible, humorous ways. The characters are designed and written exactly for this purpose: to chafe against one another for your entertainment.

Rikki Simons [colorist; voice of Gir]: I like how specifically the characters react to each other. That's always a sign of good writing: when characters don't react to each other exactly in the same ways.

Chris Viscardi [Executive Producer, Nickelodeon]: *Invader Zim*'s characters resonate because no matter how well-intentioned some of the characters may be, they're all idiots. And idiocy is timeless! And idiocy is funny! Especially in a cartoon.



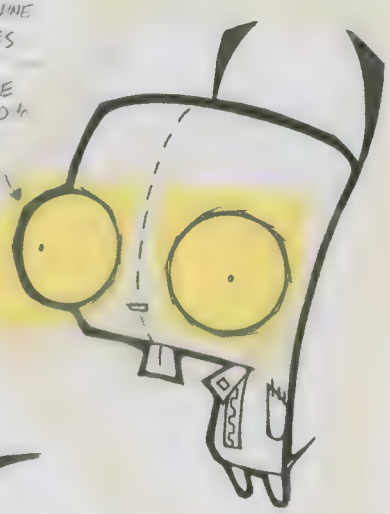
This spread: Clean-up guides created by character designer Aaron Alexovich with a note by art director Bryan Konietzko to overseas supervisor Derek Eversfield. The difference in the dos and don'ts in these guides seem minor, but when enforced they maintain the visual uniqueness of *Zim* the series.

STOCK CLEAN-UP GUIDES FOR ALL CHARACTERS

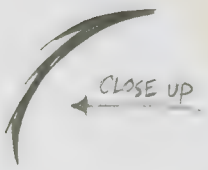
SPECIAL CASES

1. DOG-SUIT GIR HAS A RAGGED LINE AROUND HIS EYES

THE RAGGED LINE DOESN'T EXTEND to THE EXTERIOR



CLOSE UP

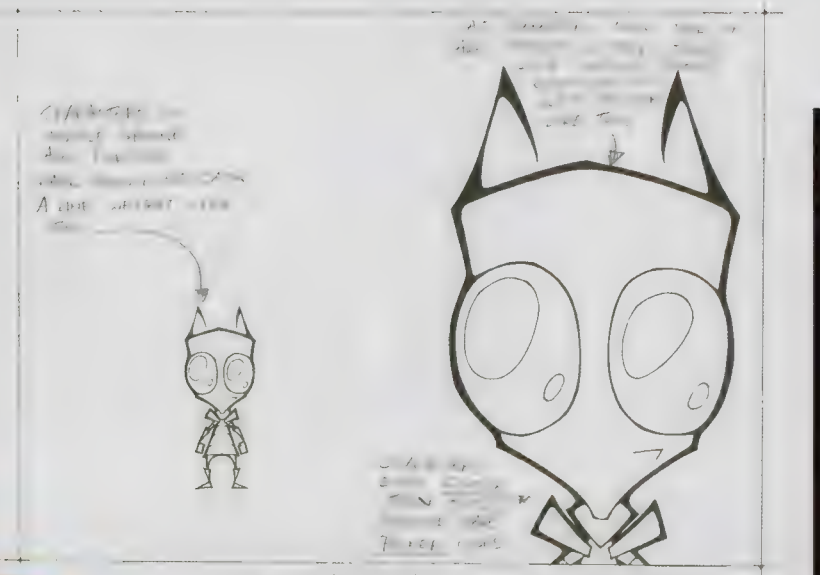


2. WHEN OPEN, GIR'S EYES HAVE A THICK BLACK OUTLINE

ALMOST AS THICK AS THE EXTERIOR LINES

ALSO APPLIES to TAK

3 OF 3



CLEAN UP LINE WIEGHT REFERENCE

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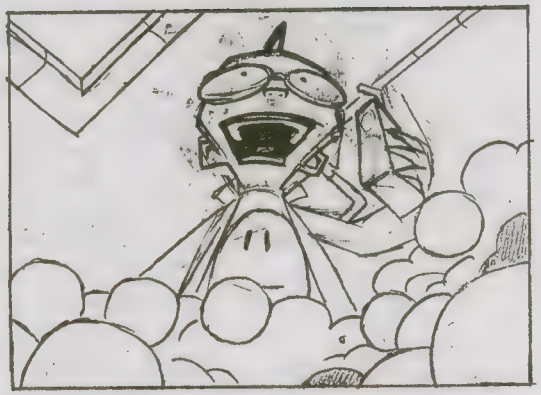
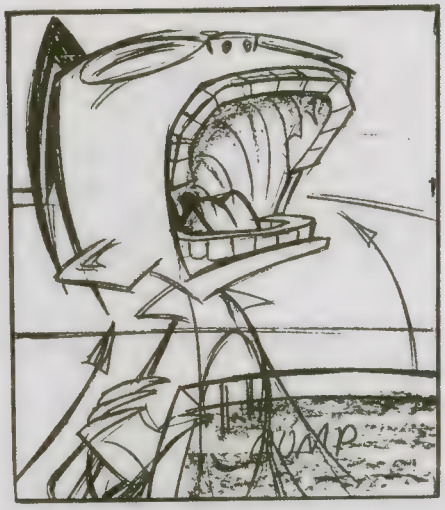
CHARACTER CLEAN-UP REFERENCE

ON MODEL

ROUGH

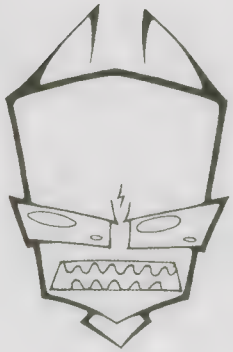


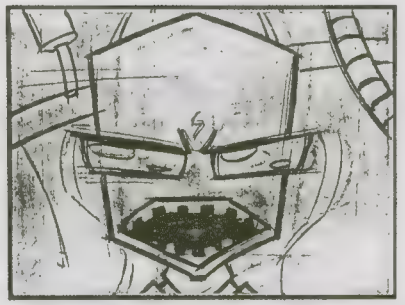


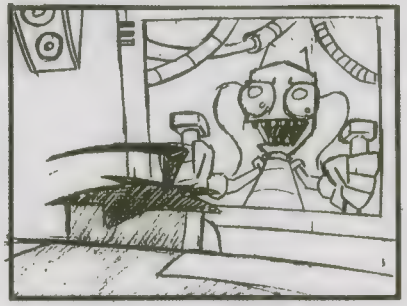
CHARACTER CLEAN-UP REFERENCE

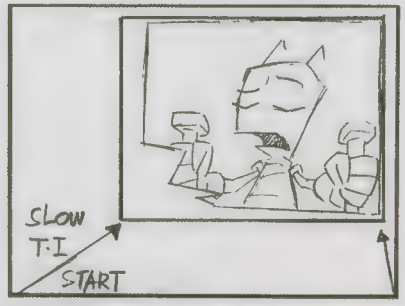
ON MODEL

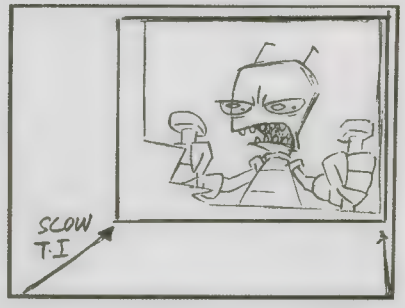
ROUGH









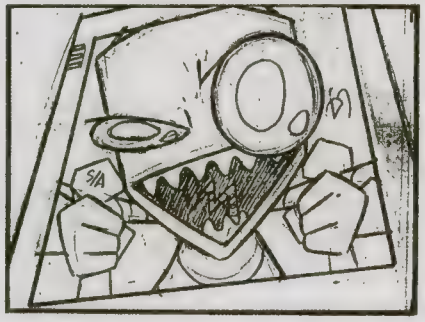


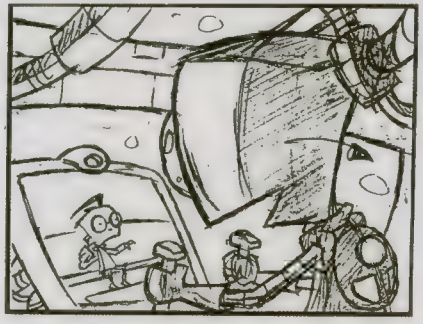
CHARACTER CLEAN-UP

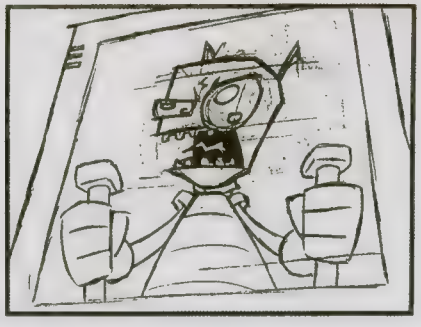
CHARACTER CLEAN-UP REFERENCE

ON MODEL

ROUGH



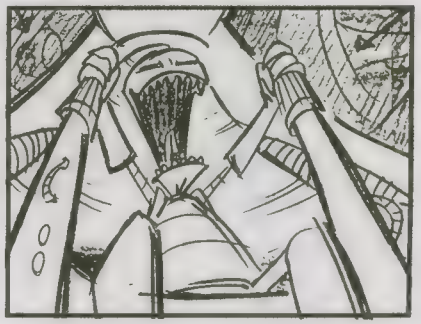


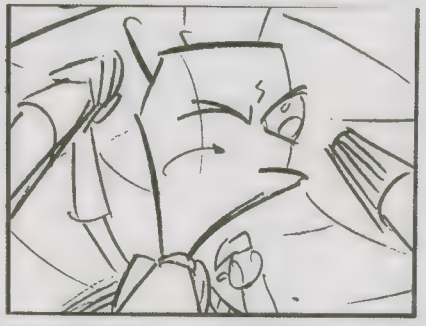


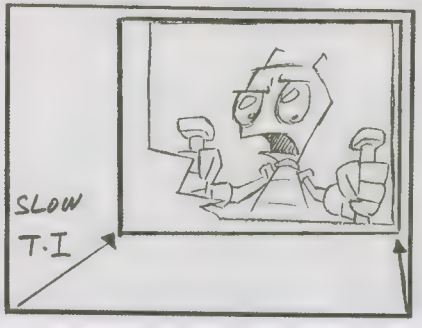
CHARACTER CLEAN-UP REFERENCE

ON MODEL

ROUGH







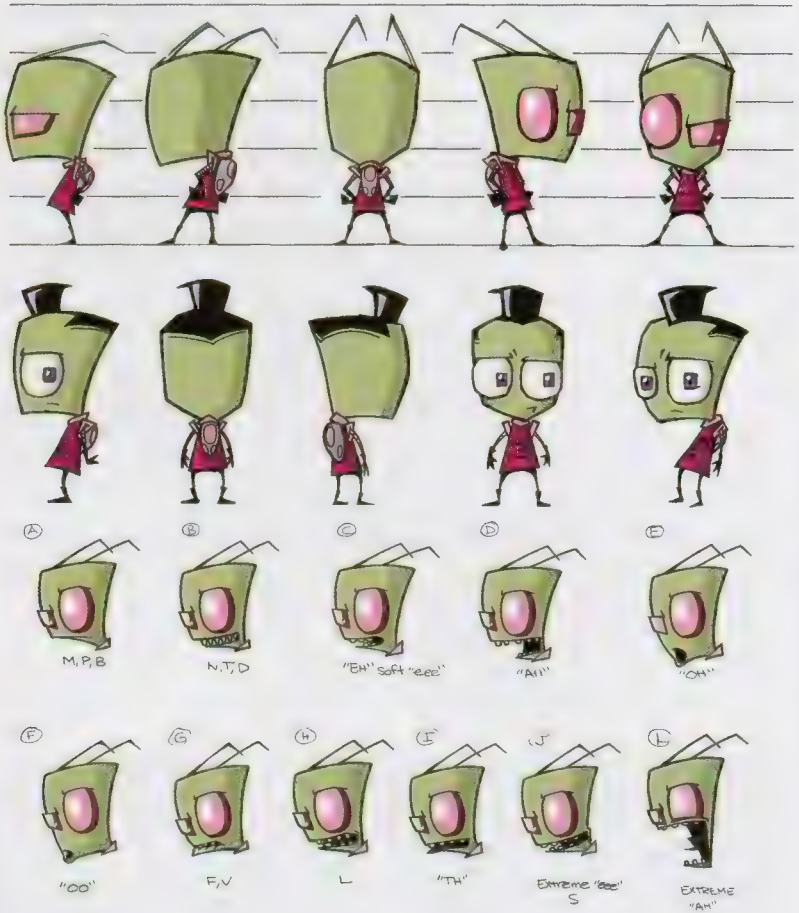
This spread: A selection of four character clean-up reference sheets which were designed to assist the animation studio in interpreting the storyboard drawings into on-model animation drawings. In addition to the line qualities detailed on the previous spread, these clean-up on-model drawings show many of the design specifics of the series that artists would have to familiarize themselves with, such as the flattening and spacing out of Dib's teeth.

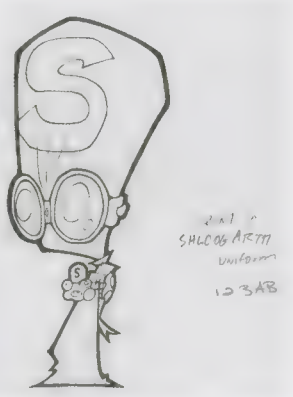
ZIM

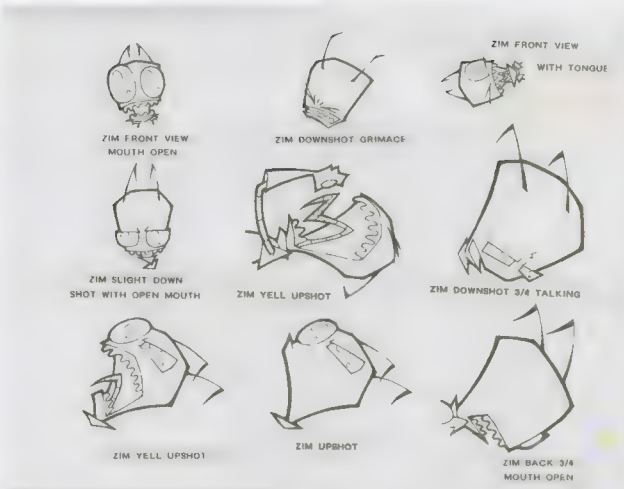
Zim is a tenacious, tireless, and confident invader. Zim's narcissistic tendencies render him unable to understand that he is not the Almighty Tallest's finest invader, but in fact, the butt of their jokes. His only desire is to prove his worthiness by successfully laying the groundwork for the Earth's total surrender. Zim is not dumb, but extremely paranoid and proud, and a stranger on a strange planet, learning, observing, collecting, and making outrageous, off-base plans founded on culturally Earth-ignorant assertions.

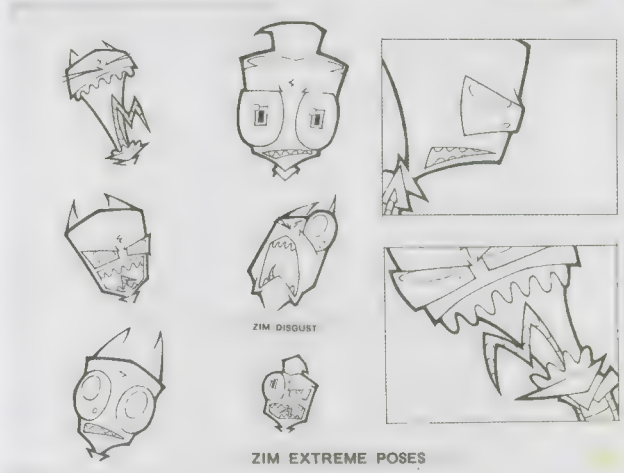
Rikki: I always thought that Zim was a combination of all of Jhonen's worst personality habits, and I always thought that he did it consciously. He just looks at himself, he says "This is the worst thing about me," and then he puts it in Zim. Because Zim is so over-the-top, that's what's great about Richard Horvitz doing the voice–because Richard is so over-the-top himself, as a human being. Richard is perfect for Zim. He can direct all of his anxiety into his voice acting. It just explodes out of the mouth of that character.

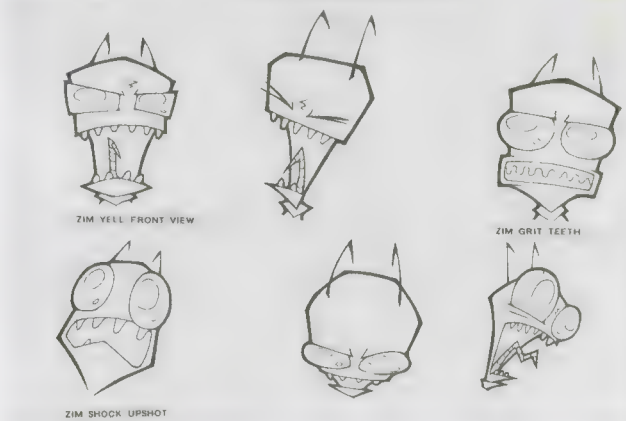
Eric Trueheart [writer]: You knew Zim screaming was usually good for a laugh. Screaming in pain. Screaming in fear. Screaming in frustration. It didn't matter. The combination of his screaming design and Richard's insane performance usually gave you something hilarious.



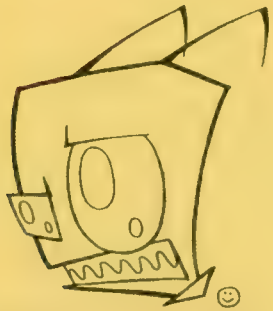








This spread: Various turnaround and special pose models for Zim including from "The Most Horrible X-Mas Ever" (EP27).

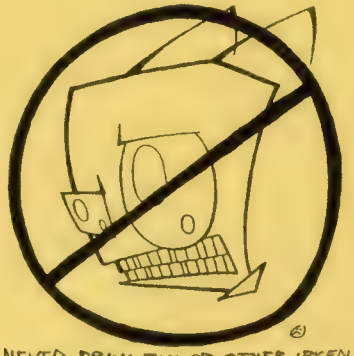


—WHEN ZIM OR OTHER IRKEN ALIENS GRIT THEIR TEETH, DRAW THEM ROUNDED AND INTERLOCKED LIKE THESE.

*IN AN EXTREME YELL, ZIM'S TEETH CAN ELONGATE AND SHARPEN SLIGHTLY, AND BECOME UNEVEN, SUCH AS THE ABOVE DRAWING.

*IN A VERY EXTREME YELLING POSE, ZIM'S AND OTHER IRKEN ALIENS' TEETH CAN BE CREATED IN A SLIGHT BEVD, LIKE THE ABOVE DRAWING.

DO NOT DRAW ZIM'S CHIN LEADING INTO HIS MOUTH LIKE THIS. SEE MOUTHCHART POSITION (A) FOR THE CORRECT WAY.



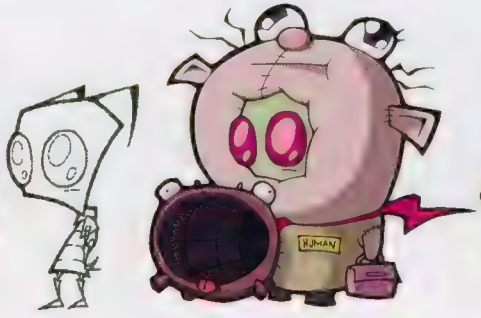
—NEVER DRAW ZIM OR OTHER IRKEN ALIENS WITH STRAIGHT, SQUARED-OFF TEETH LIKE THESE. THAT IS RESERVED FOR DIB AND OTHER HUMANS.

DO NOT DRAW ZIM WITH SQUARED-OFF, SEPARATED TEETH — EVEN IN AN EXTREME YELL SUCH AS THIS.

SPECIAL POSE/COSTUME 130B

ZIM AS SANTA (1 of 2)

(HATCH OPEN)



(FILLED WITH SANTA)

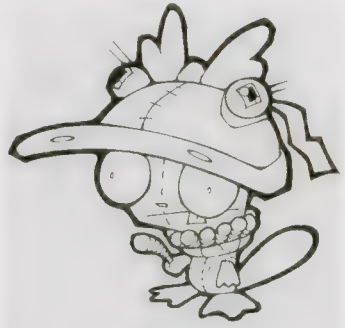
GIR

Gir is a malfunctioning robot sidekick to Zim, or as Zim puts it, "A robot slave of my own!" Childlike, enthusiastic, and possessing a remarkably short attention span, Gir also eats an alarming amount of organic material for a mechanical being. Gir's eyes are blue, but occasionally burn red, indicating intermittent bursts of normal functionality. Gir's Earth disguise is an adorable green puppy jumpsuit.

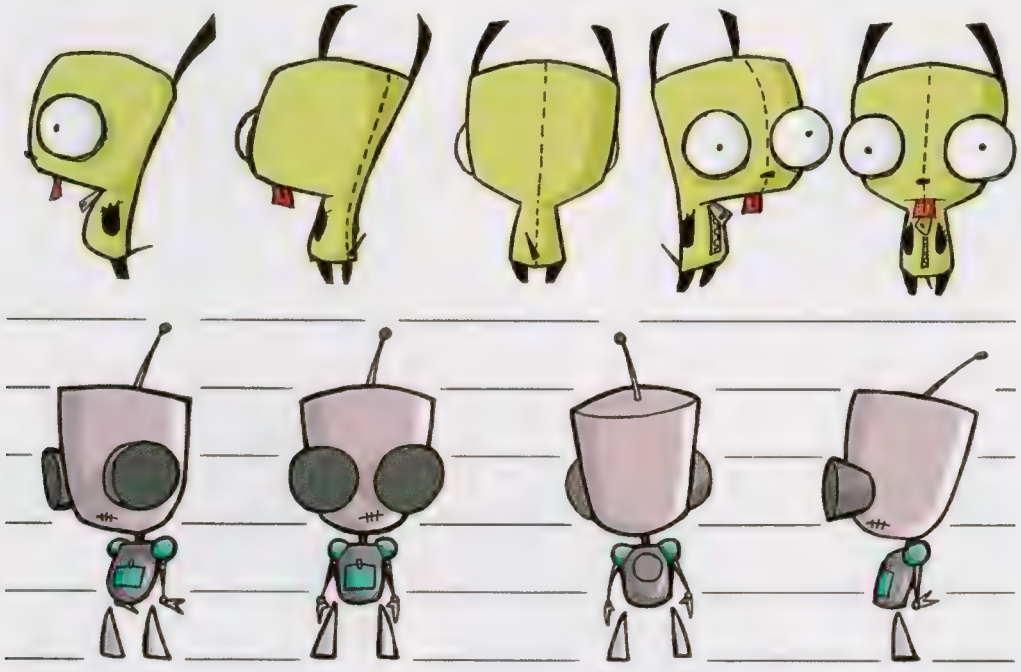
Rikki: He's innocent, but his innocence is to the point of being a lunatic. Who knows what he does when he's completely unleashed? He's the one character who's happy because he's so stupid. And I think one of the lessons that Jhonen is trying to impart is that the happiest characters are the dumbest.

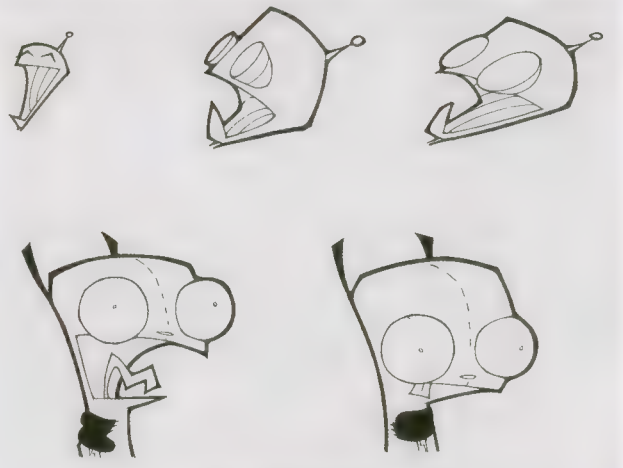
Bryan Konietzko [storyboard artist, art director]: I think Gir was my favorite, possibly because he was the only character who seemed to feel comfortable and at ease in that world—maybe the only one who wasn't suffering. He fully accepted, embraced, embodied, and channeled the absurdity of it all. I'm guessing Jhonen would say he didn't have a choice because he was a broken, malfunctioning robot.

Jhonen: There's been a lot of retconning Gir's origin, because really, he shouldn't work at all. In the first episode we have him just literally made from pocket garbage that the Tallest had, which I think is funny because they don't even have any pockets. They dump a bunch of crap into some robot parts from the trash and it works. Gir shouldn't really even exist, so I always think it's funny when people ask about Gir, because I'm like, "I don't know . . . Why are you even asking me?" The fact that his eyes can go red, that he functions for completely half a second properly is kind of a miracle. So yeah, SIR units [Standard-Issue Information Retrieval units assigned to Irken invaders] are supposed to have red eyes, they're supposed to be these little sidekicks, and every now and again Gir has shades of it, but that's about as deep as it goes.



GIR IN PLATYPUS DISGUISE





GIR EXPRESSIONS

This spread: Gir turnarounds, expressions, a model sheet, and various special pose models and stills.

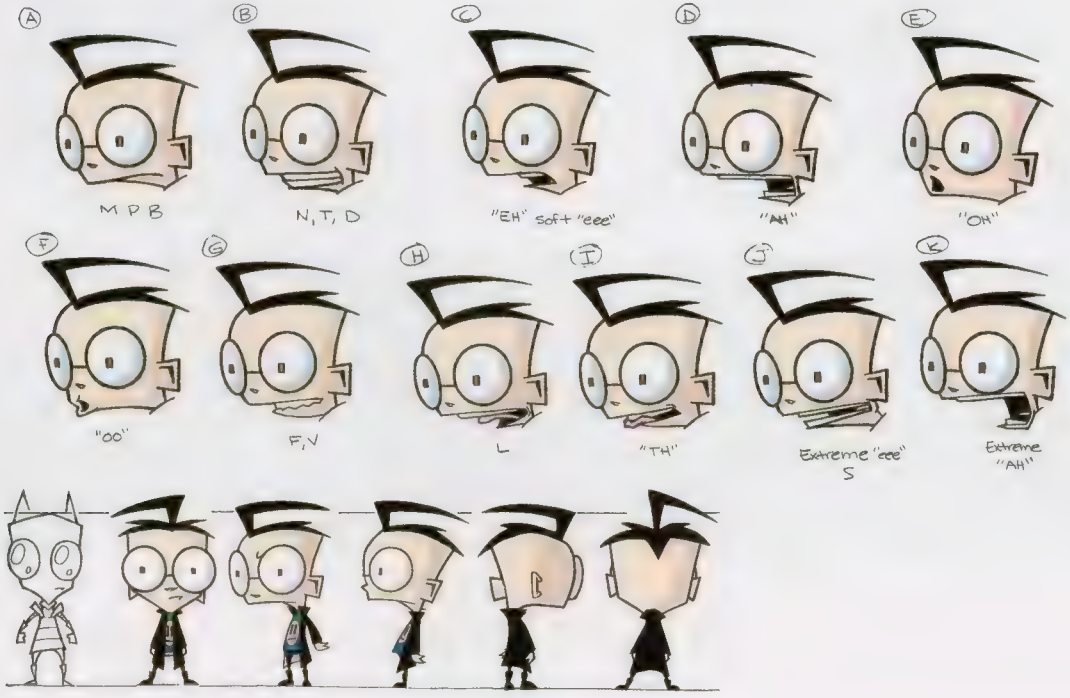
DIB

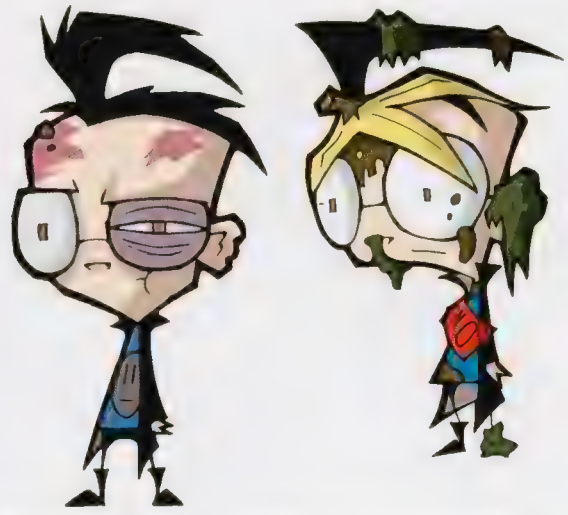
Dib is the conspiracy-theorist, paranormal-investigator child-wiz son of Professor Membrane, the most important, most famous scientist who does real, respectable science-y things on television, no less. Dib's reality is one of almost constant madness . . . witnessing atrocities executed in broad daylight by Zim and being the only one on Earth who knows (or cares) about them. Worse, Dib's paranormal research is dismissed as a crackpot-stuff by his father and as a rage-inducing annoyance by his sister. Despite this incessant turmoil, Dib manages to focus on his mission to expose Zim and gain the respect of his father. After resigning himself to the fact that no one else around him cares to see the poorly disguised alien in plain sight, Dib focuses instead on containment and torment, and thwarting Zim's plans and everyday existence like a schoolyard bully for aliens.

Rikki: Dib cares so much about what people think about him. I think with Dib, it's more so not actually about saving the planet, but about proving to everybody that he's someone that people should respect. I think teenagers–especially young teens–can really connect with that when they're seeking respect and they don't have any. You're completely powerless as a child.

Eric: I love Dib because he's one of the only characters with painful sense of how absurd everything is. He's the reality-check in a scene. Except when it comes to his own paranormal obsession, of course.

Jhonen: Dib genuinely wants to protect the world and his people despite the fact that nobody believes him. But a good deal of that drive is so that he can then say, "Look everyone, I saved you, praise me!" There's definitely a huge amount of ego that goes into why he does what he does.



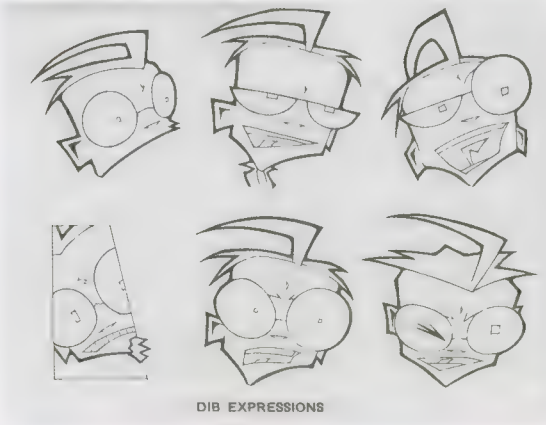


S002 DIB BEAT UP.

S003 DIB COVERED IN TRASH.

S008 DIB COVERED IN FOOD.

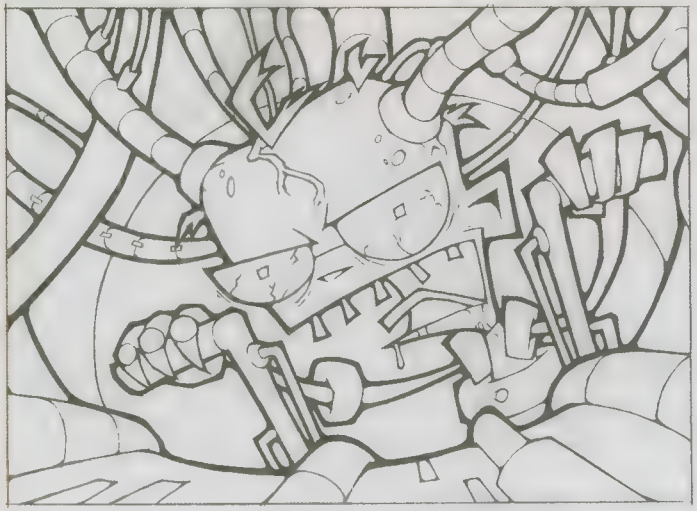
DIB IN ELF DISGUISE

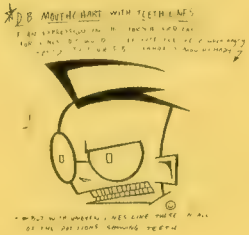


DIB EXPRESSIONS

DO NOT DRAW DIB'S CHIN LEADING INTO HIS MOUTH LIKE THIS. SEE MOUTH/JART POSITION (A) FOR THE CORRECT WAY.

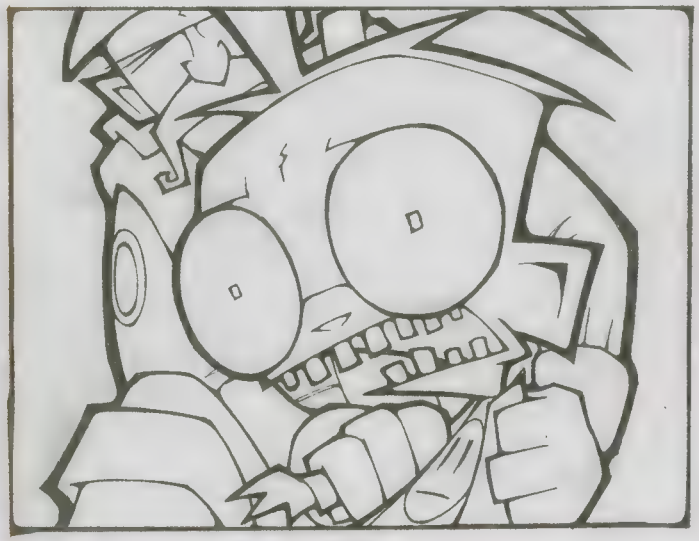
*DO NOT DRAW DIB OR OTHER HUMANS WITH INTERLOCKING TEETH SUCH AS THESE — THAT IS RESERVED FOR ZIM AND OTHER IRKEN ALIENS.

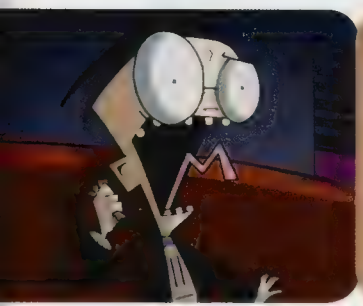


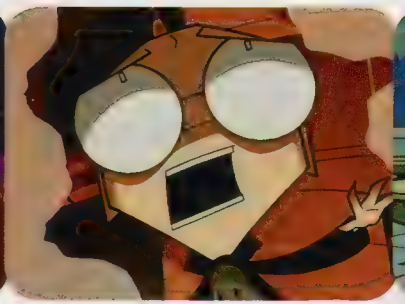


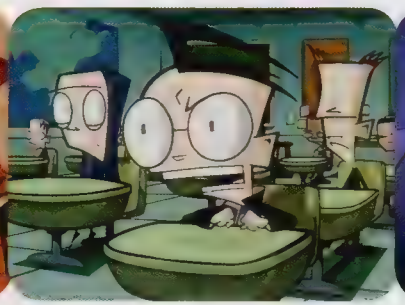
IN THE EXTREME YELLING POSE, GREAT DIB TEETH OVER SO THAT HE DISPLAYS FEWER, WIDELY SPACED, UNEVEN TEETH

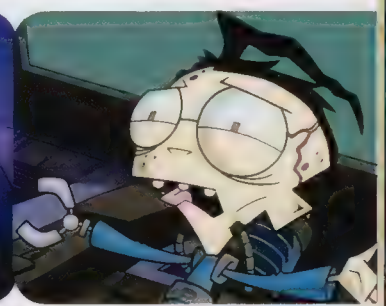
*IN A VERY EXTREME YELLING POSE, DIB'S AND OTHER HUMANS' TEETH CAN BE TREATED LIKE THIS.











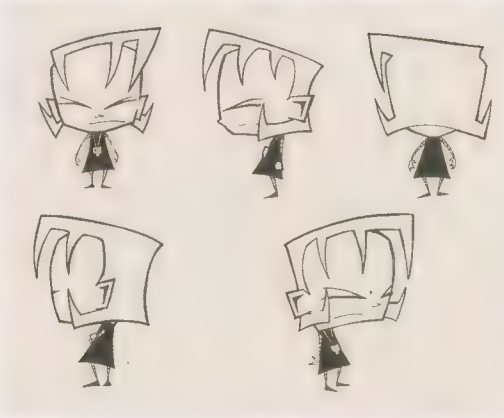
This spread: Dib turnarounds, expressions, some dos and don'ts guidelines, storyboard panels, and various special pose models and stills.

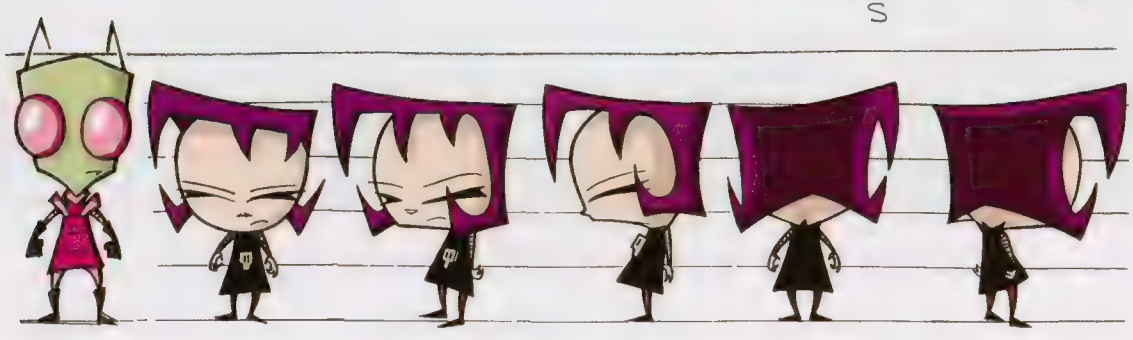
GAZ

Gaz is a dark and pessimistic gamer, daughter to Membrane, sister to Dib. Sullen, reserved, and hyper-focused on her handheld, Gaz would rather die gaming in a fiery alien-induced apocalypse than have to listen to much more of her brother's paranoid ranting about aliens. Gaz delights in opportunities for vengeance on her brother Dib, as payback for enduring a lifetime of his absurd experiments. Gaz also loves to toy with Zim's paranoia, well aware that he is an alien, and easy to trigger. Gaz appreciates the little family time that the Membranes get to share, especially when it involves pizza or weenies, but she is not as desperate for her father's approval as Dib, and can contentedly pass the time creating creepy art in her spooky bedroom.

Eric: I always assumed that deep down Gaz's attitude was a coping mechanism for how messed-up her home life really was. Absent dad, crazy brother, mysteriously unmentioned mother, etc. I don't know if anyone else thought this way. Gaz's character could walk a line between horrible and sympathetic, so you had to be careful not to fall too hard on the horrible side.

S001 GAZ AS BAT MONSTER.





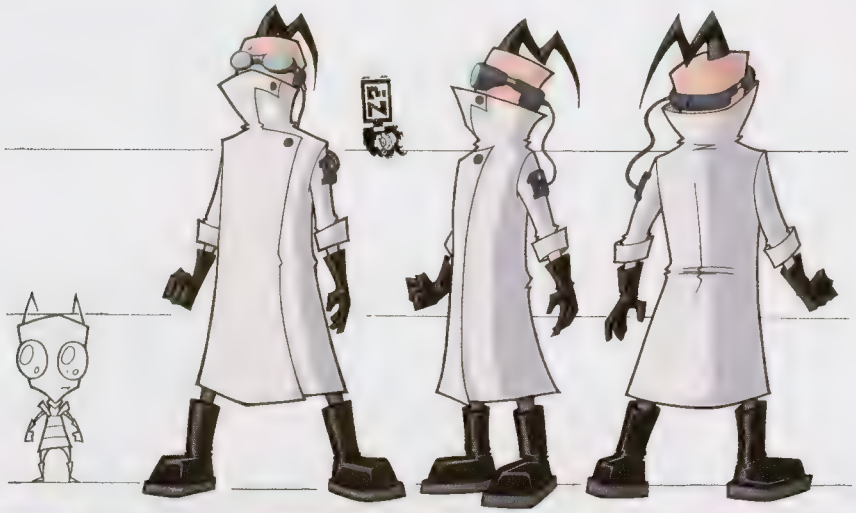
This spread: Gaz turnarounds, expressions, storyboards, and various special pose models and stills.

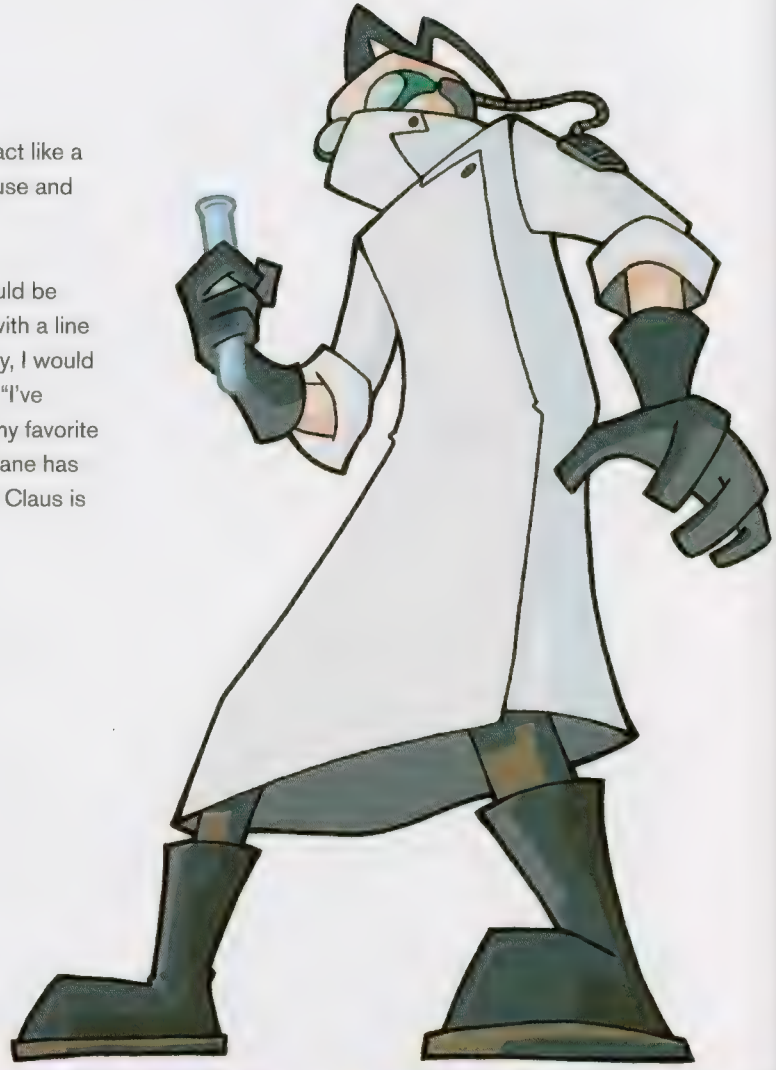
PROFESSOR MEMBRANE

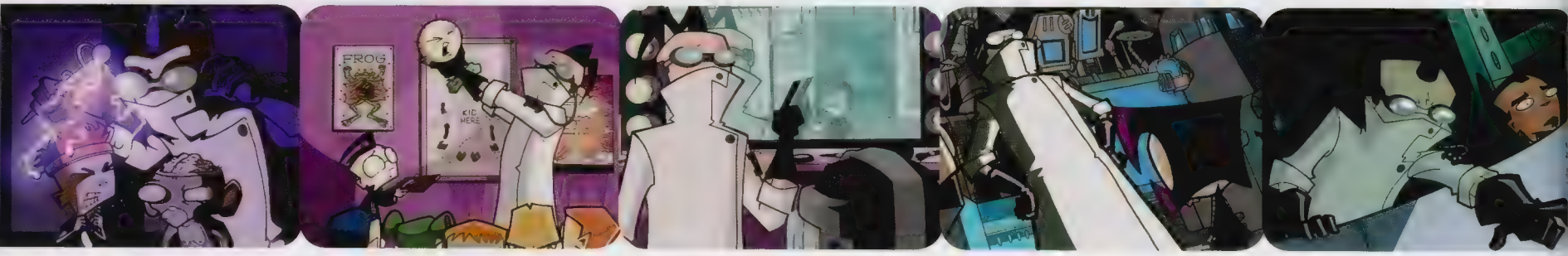
Professor Membrane is the reality-TV scientist of tomorrow. Completely preoccupied with his work, and being a science superstar on his show *Probing the Membrane of Science*, Membrane's children largely have to take care of themselves around the house without him. Beyond shelter, Professor Membrane also provides food, and in the spirit of family togetherness makes sure to schedule in a once-a-year outing with his children to a reasonably priced local chain restaurant.

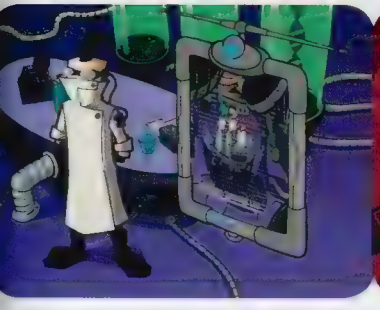
Jhonen: The dad in the series is horrible. [*laughs*] He was present for the kids usually in the form of a screen, or recorded messages. He didn't act like a dad so much as a man that lived in the house and that fed those children.

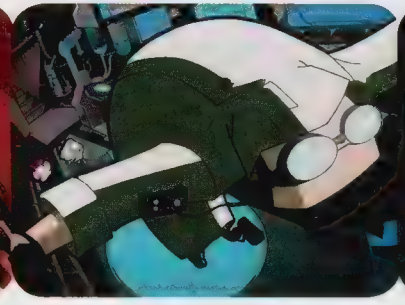
Eric: I loved how Professor Membrane could be over-the-top dramatic. If I could come up with a line that would end with him posing majestically, I would be happy for days. OK, maybe only hours. "I've never trusted that jolly fat man!" is one of my favorite Membrane moments. The idea that Membrane has held an active, life-long suspicion of Santa Claus is hilarious to me.

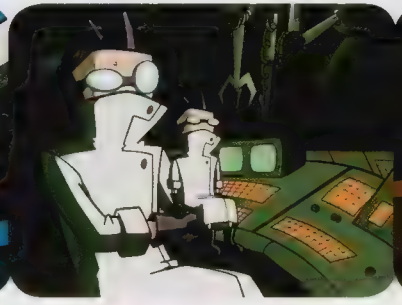


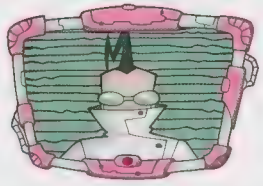












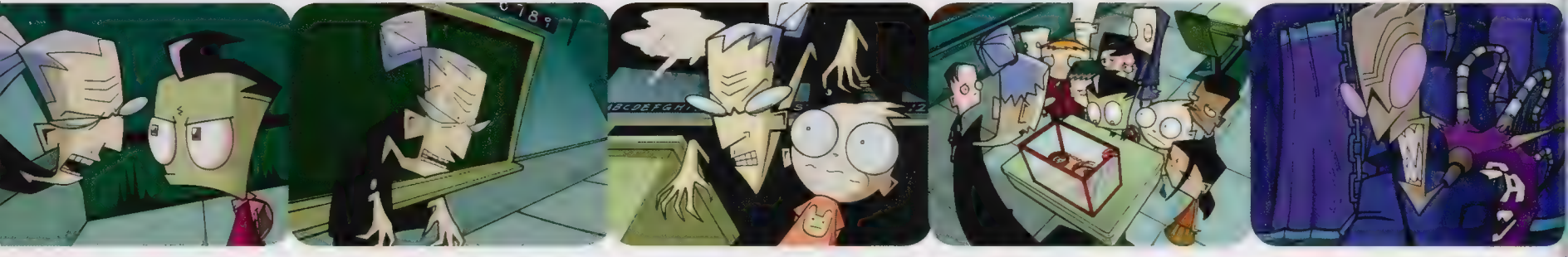
This spread: Professor Membrane turnarounds and various special pose models and stills.

MS. BITTERS

Ms. Bitters is an inexplicable slithering presence at Skool, and Zim and Dib's classroom teacher. Ms. Bitters excels at squashing any childhood joy from her pupils with dreary anecdotes about their inevitably soul-crushing futures. Not subject to the natural laws of physics, she is able to flow through the air with an insectine rattling to materialize anywhere a caustic quip about the drudgery of existence is needed most.
The moment when Ms. Bitters shows off the new class pet, Peepi the hamster, who is running in place in a hamster wheel ("Hamstergeddon" [S1EP9B]) encapsulates her character:

Ms. Bitters: Take a good look, children. It will prepare you for your adult lives in our nightmarish corporate system.

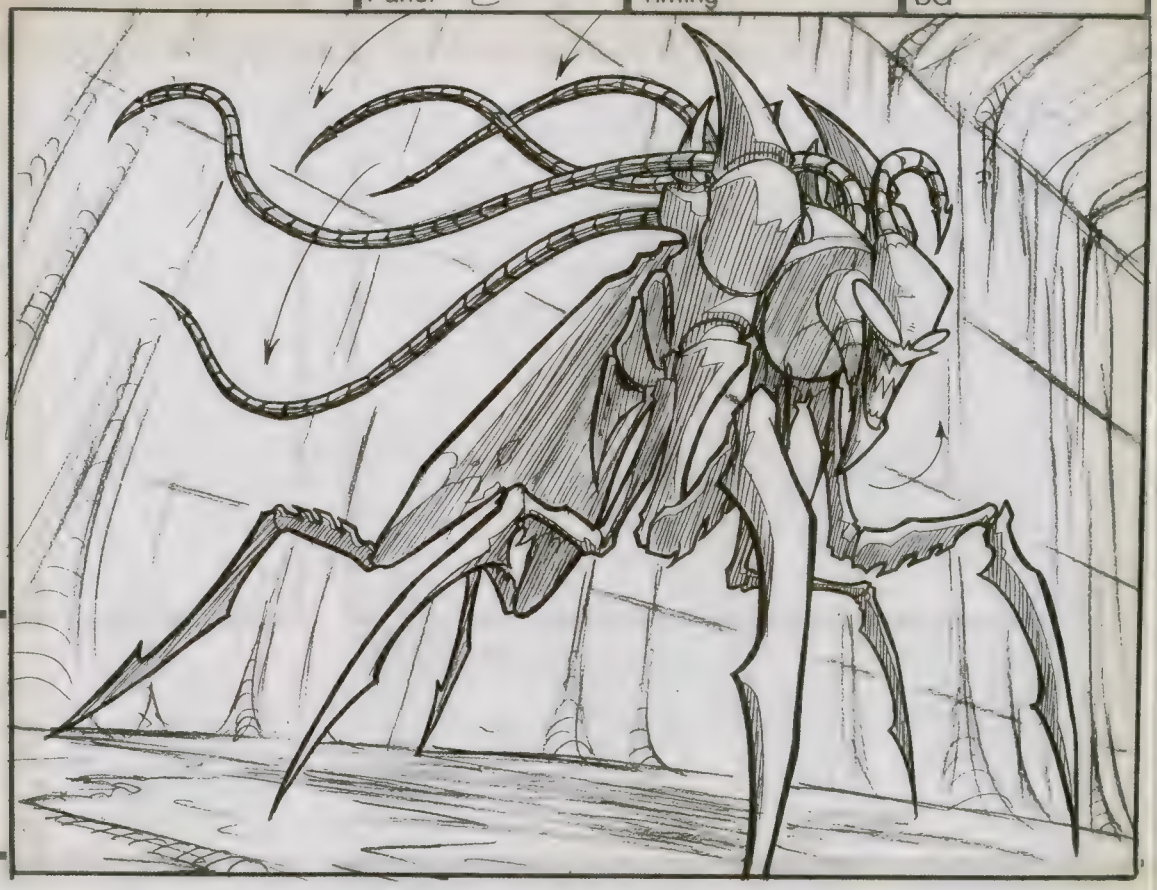
Bryan: Ms. Bitters has the line that I think best exemplifies the notion that *Zim* was the evilest show ever made for children: "Children, your performance was miserable. Your parents will all receive phone calls instructing them to love you less now." ["Door to Door" (EP11A)]



This spread: Some of Ms. Bitters's more unusual forms are featured here in special pose models such as Nightmare Bitters from the episode "Halloween Spectacular of Spooky Doom" (EP14).

Scene Cont

Panel C	Timing	BG

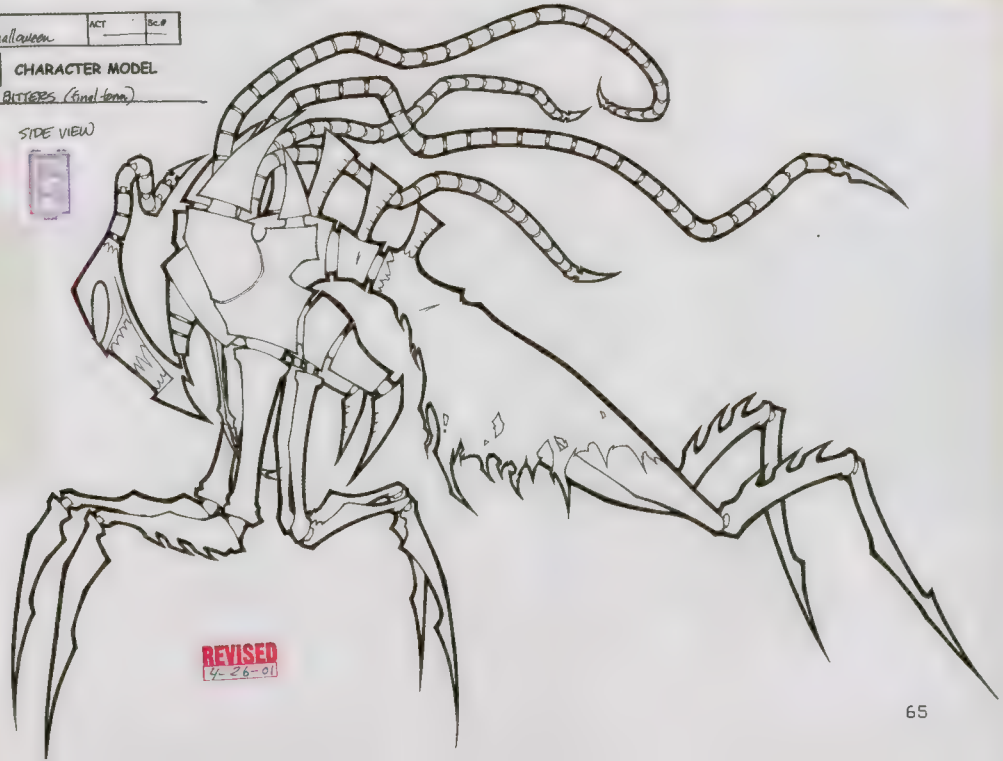


INVADER ZIM	TITLE halloween	ACT	Sc.#
EPISODE# 116AB			
DATE 3-29-1	ARTIST JV/AA	CHARACTER MODEL	

DESCRIPTION: NIGHTMARE BITERS (final form)

116AB. S037
1 OF 4

SIDE VIEW

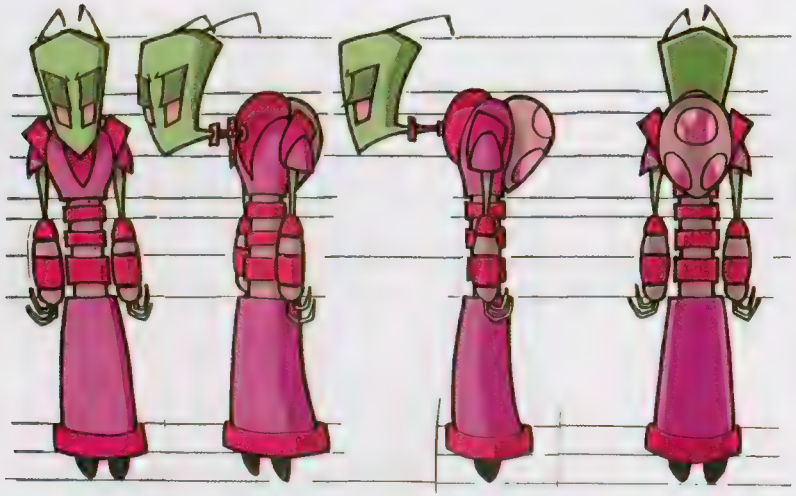


REVISED 4-26-01

ALMIGHTY TALLEST & IRKENS

The supreme leaders of the Irken race, the Almighty Tallest are the most vertically gifted of their kind. In a height-based society, this grants them the power to do whatever they want, which is mostly grandstanding and goofing around while their competent underlings do their bidding. One has red eyes and the other has purple, but both share a disdain for Zim.

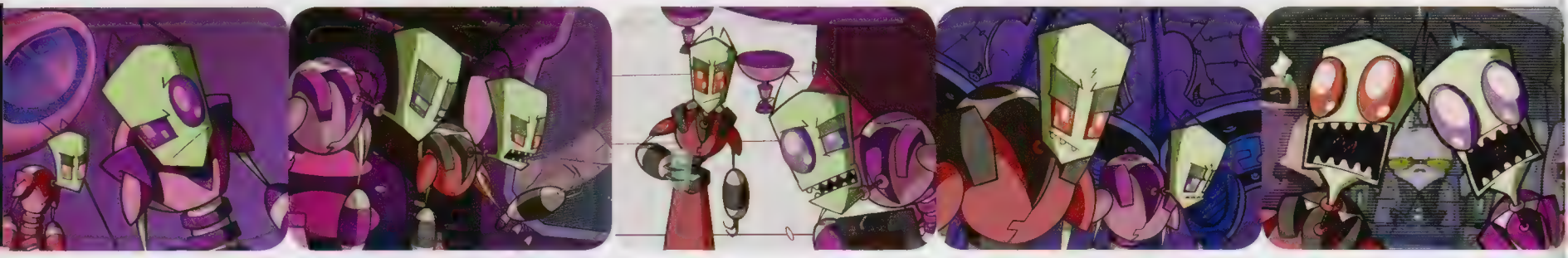
Jhonen: When I was coming up with *Invader Zim*, I spent a lot of time thinking about how stupid everything was. [*laughs*] The Tallest are one of the best expressions of that–that worth is based on physical appearance, and that your value as a leader is based on your height. I mean, it literally could have been anything, but I went with height, which is as dumb as anything. They're sort of a distant relation to these two aliens that I would draw before, and I thought they looked good standing next to each other. Then they also sort became like parents, with these two tall people with this tiny little childlike figure, Zim, always looking for approval. They sort of act as very unappreciative parents.



S001 TAK AS HUMAN

S002 TAK'S SIR (AS CAT)

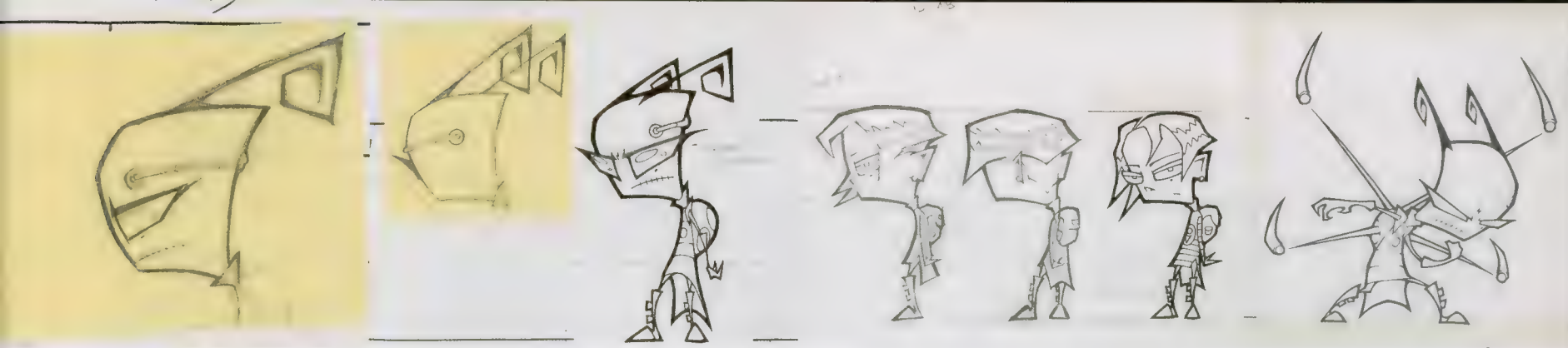
C010 TAK'S DAD.



Above: Character models for the Almighty Tallest and Tak in her Irken state and human disguise.

Opposite: Pencils for Tak designs and character models for the Irken Elite soldiers that were set to debut in the unfinished episode "The Trial."

Additional designs are a selection of the cast of extra Irkens who populate the backgrounds and bit parts throughout the series.



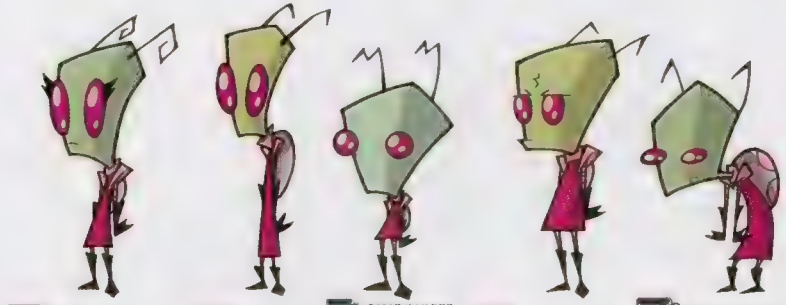
C014 IRKEN ELITE

C015 IRKEN ELITE

C016 IRKEN ELITE

C013 IRKEN ELITE.

C017 IRKEN ELITE



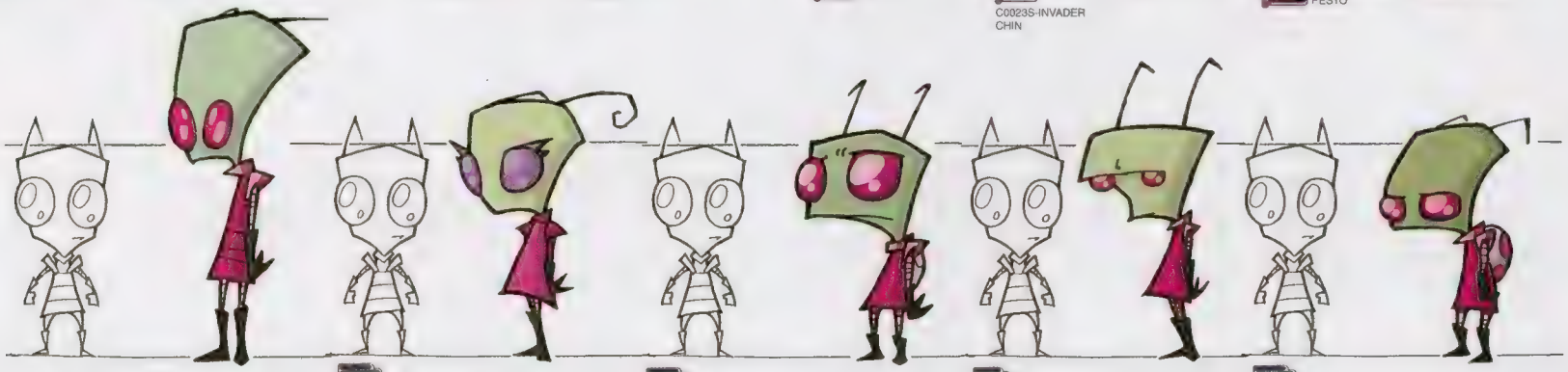
C0023O-INVADER YULI

C0023S-INVADER CHIN

C023E-INVADER NEN

C023J INVADER PESTO

C0023T-INVADER GOOCH



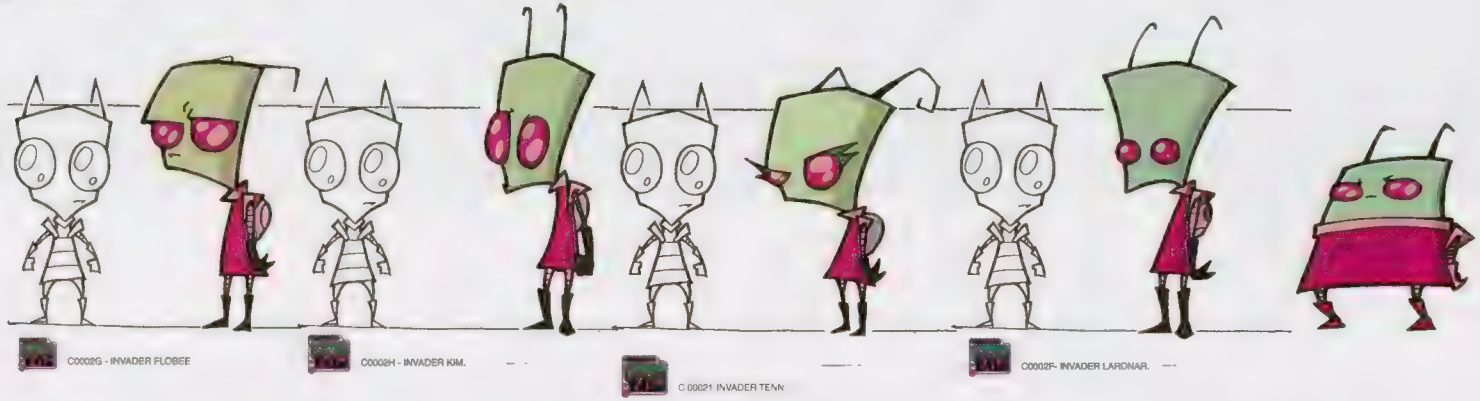
C002A-INVADER GRAPA

C0002C INVADER ZEE

C002B- INVADER STINK

C002D-INVADER TIM.

C0002E-INVADER SKUTCH.



C0002G - INVADER FLOBEE

C0002H - INVADER KIM.

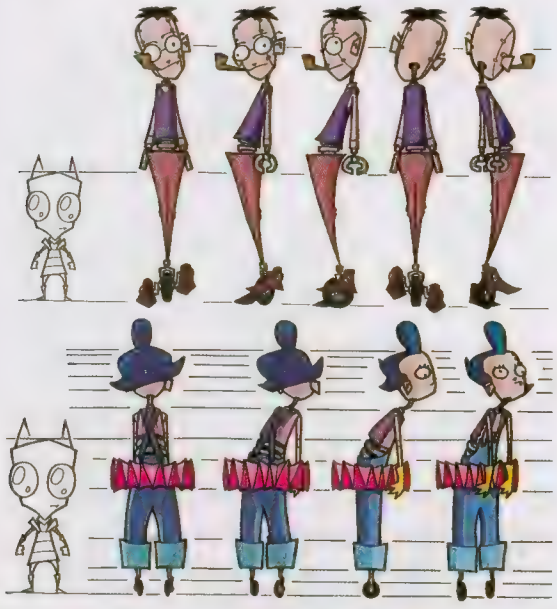
C 00021 INVADER TENN

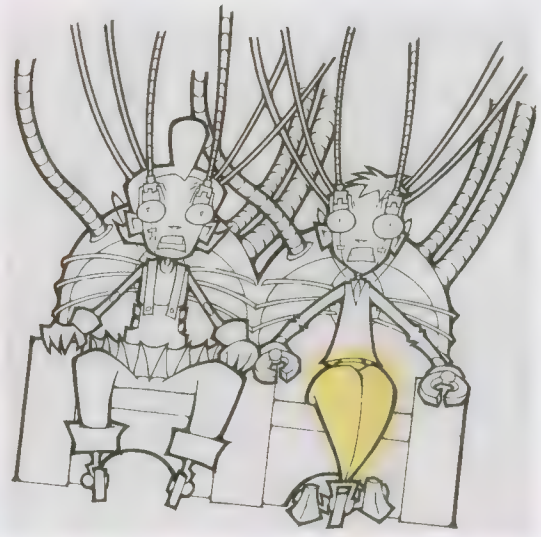
C0002F- INVADER LARDNAR.

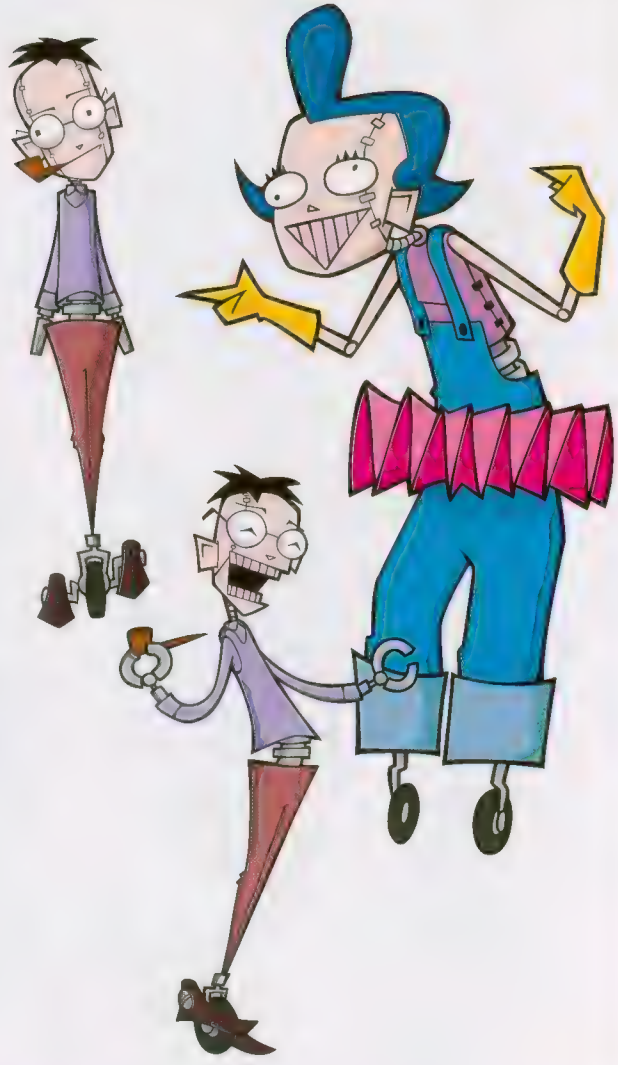
ROBOPARENTS

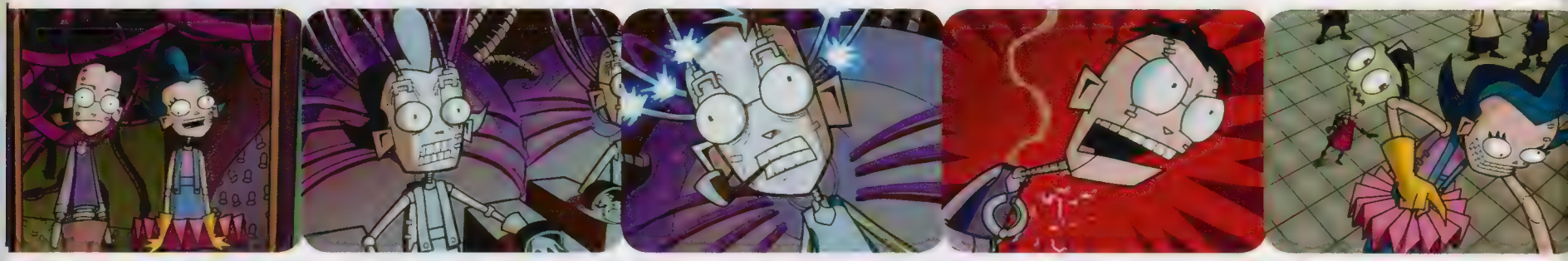
Designed by Zim to complete the illusion of suburban domestic normalcy, the Roboparents are mechanical dummies that greet Zim at the door of his secret lair. Best viewed at a distance, these Frankenstein's monster–style androids are clunky and preprogrammed with a limited library of wholesome parent-y dialog. Zim finds more uses for them as the need arises, including using them as parental stand-ins for Skool's parent-teacher night.

Jhonen: I really just liked the idea of surrounding Zim with nothing real. Just this artificial reality around him. But he's not lonely, there's nothing lonely about him. It sounds incredibly lonely, but he doesn't know that it is. I always think that Zim's greatest power is that he absolutely lacks self-awareness. There's nothing introspective about him, unless it leads to the conclusion that he's great. So the Roboparents were just an opportunity to draw more robots.





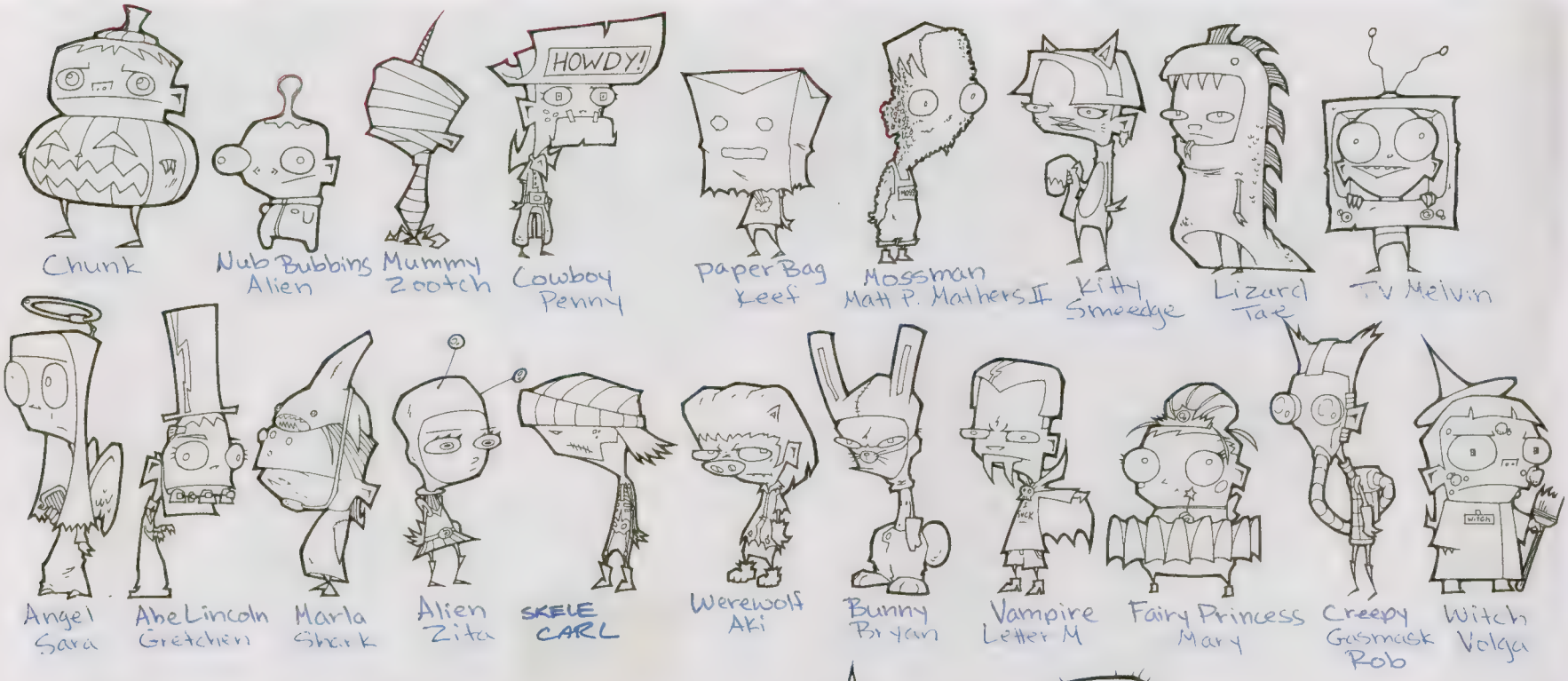




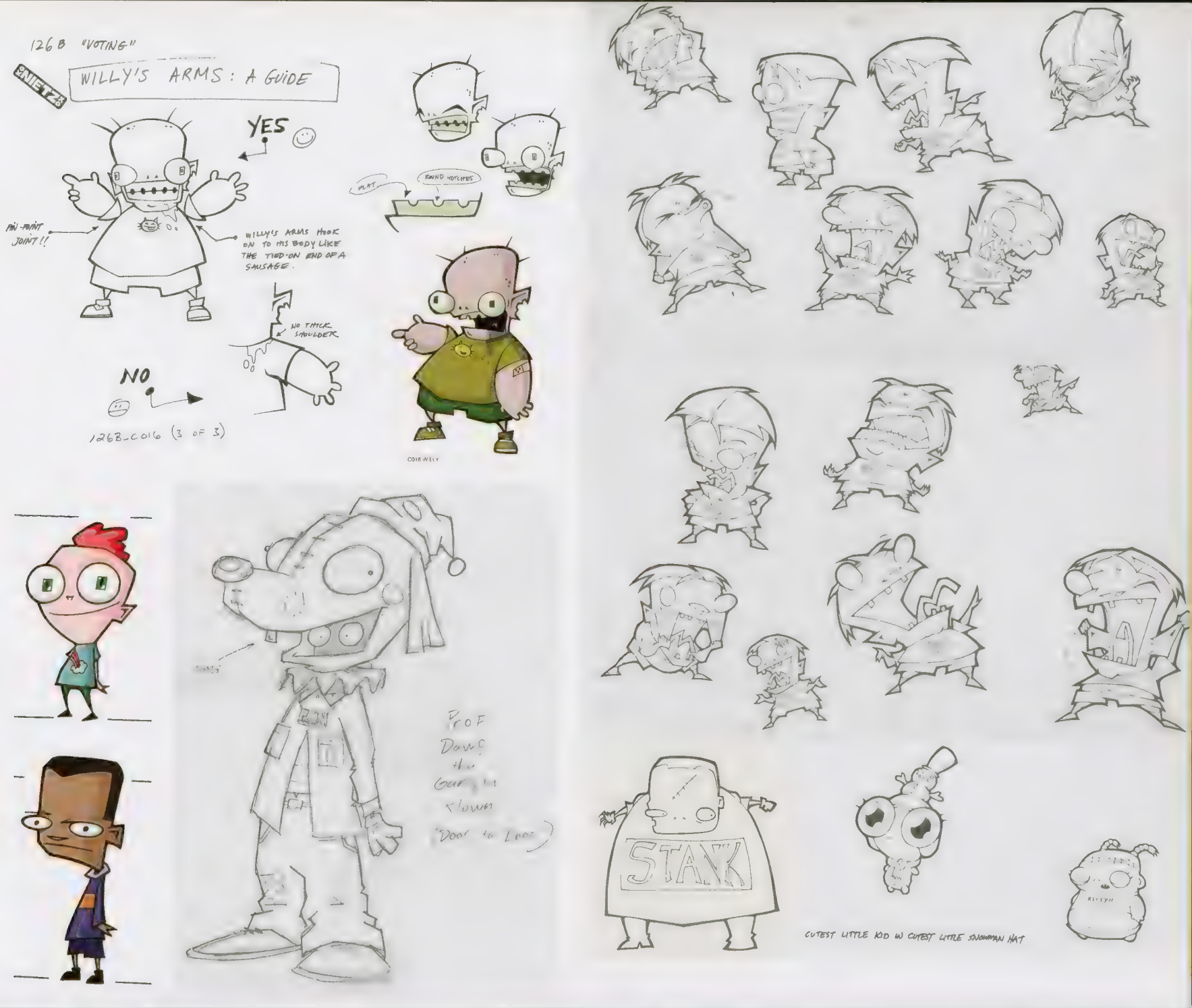
Above: The Roboparents were featured in the episode "Parent Teacher Night" (EP3A).

Opposite: The kids in Skool dressed up for Halloween in the episode "Halloween Spectacular of Spooky Doom" (EP14), and so each model needed a costume design update.

CITIZENS OF EARTH

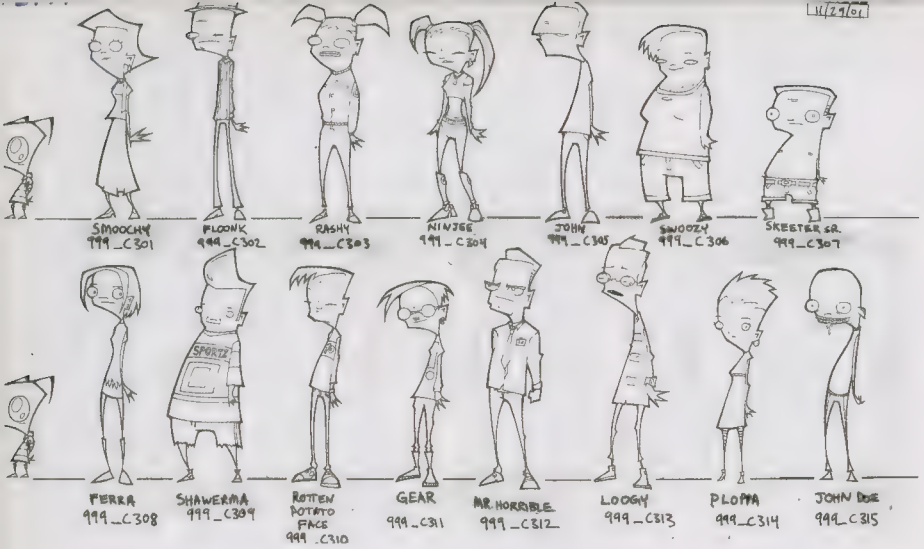


CITIZENS OF EARTH

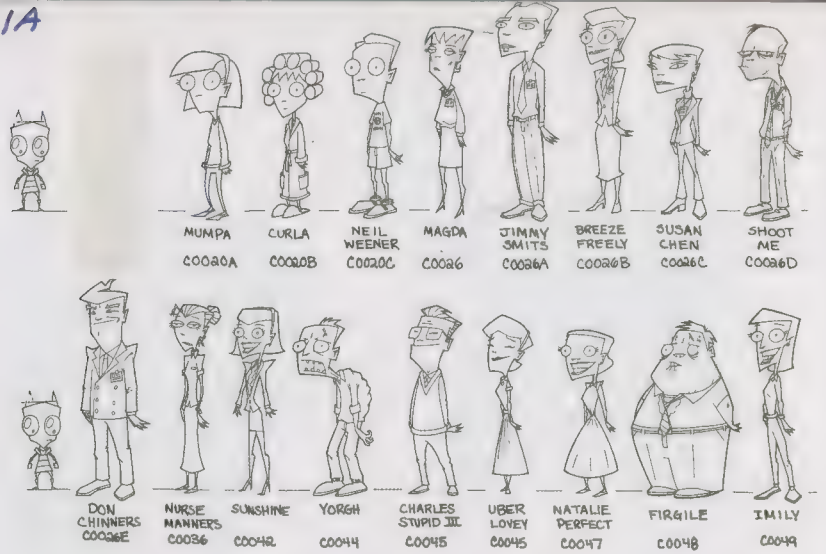


This spread: A small selection of the human life found on planet Earth, including Poop Dawg the Gangsta Klown from the episode "Door to Door" (EP11A), Willy, whose unusual arms required a special guide unto themselves, from the episode "The Voting of the Doomed" (EP24B), and Iggins, Gaz's gamer rival from the episode "Game Slave 2" (EP12B).

11/27/01

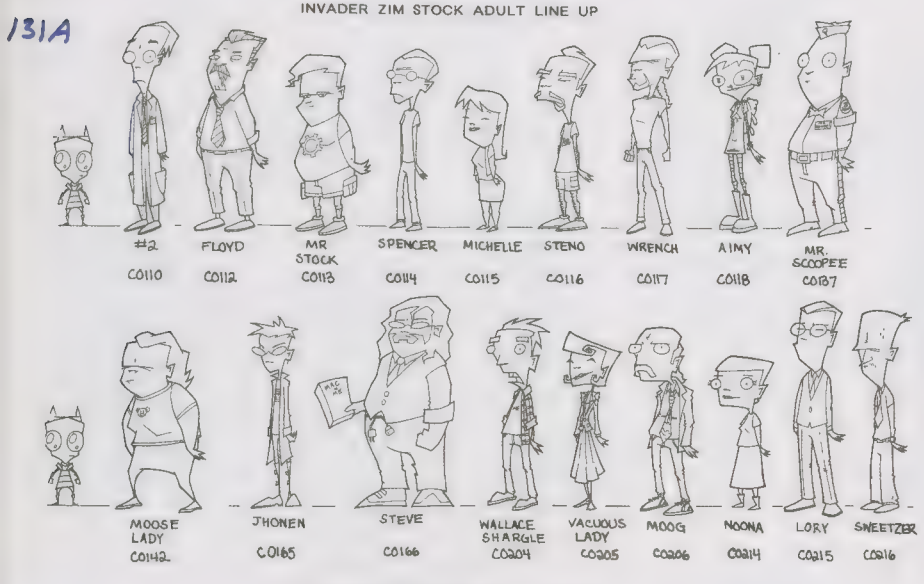


131A



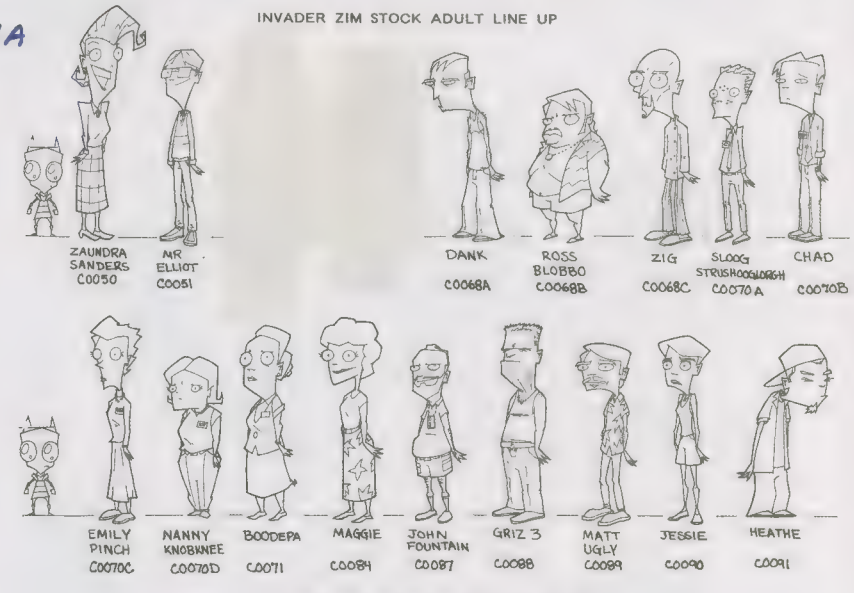
131A

INVADER ZIM STOCK ADULT LINE UP



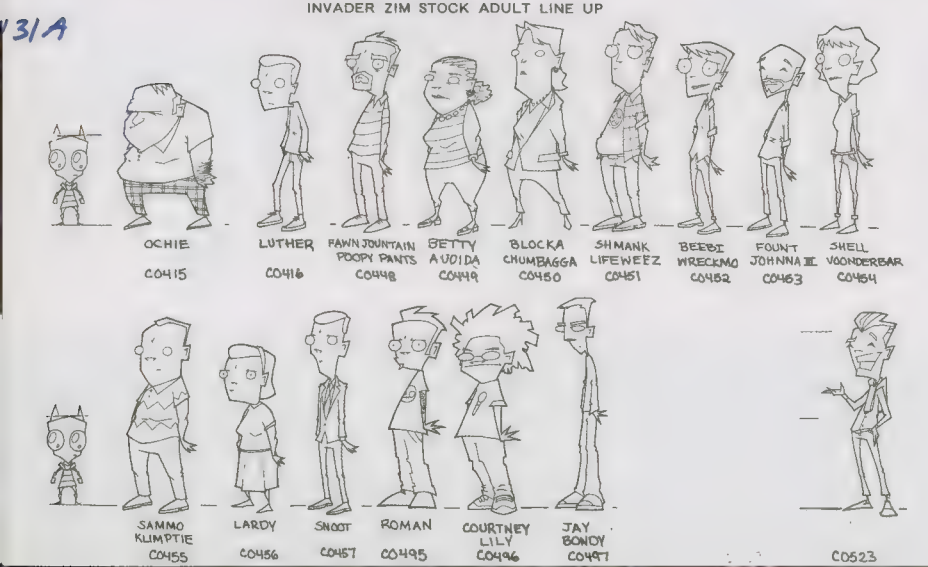
131A

INVADER ZIM STOCK ADULT LINE UP



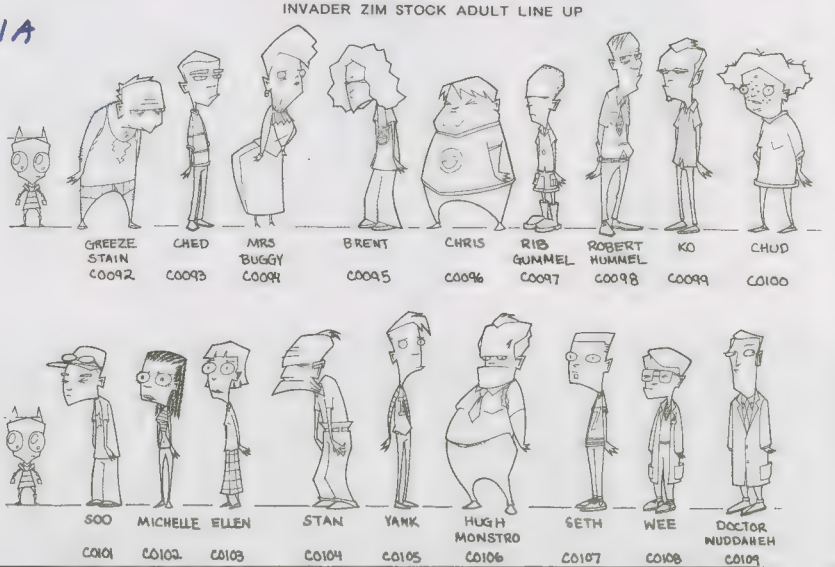
131A

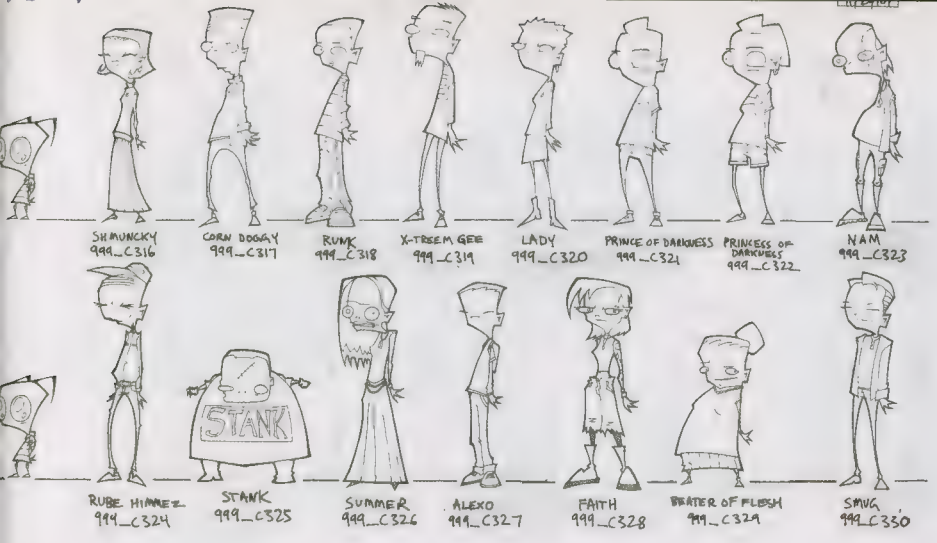
INVADER ZIM STOCK ADULT LINE UP

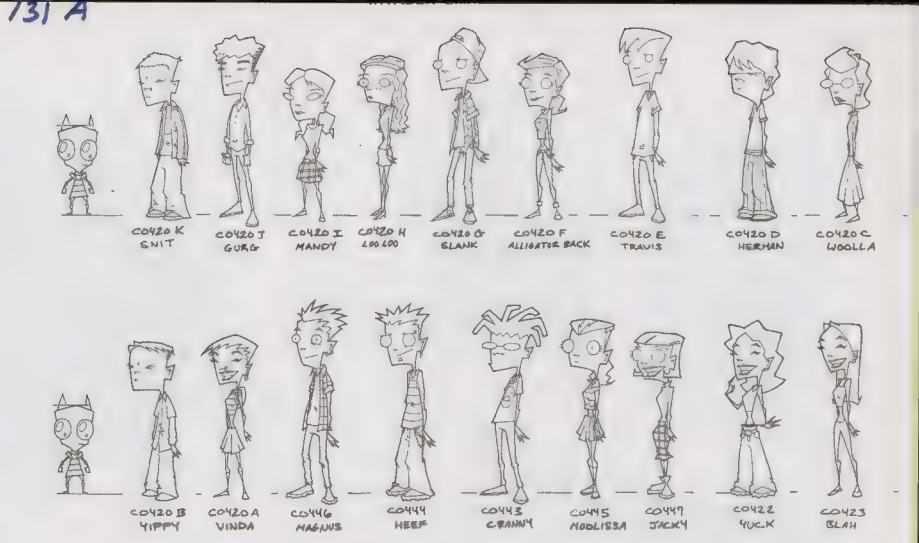


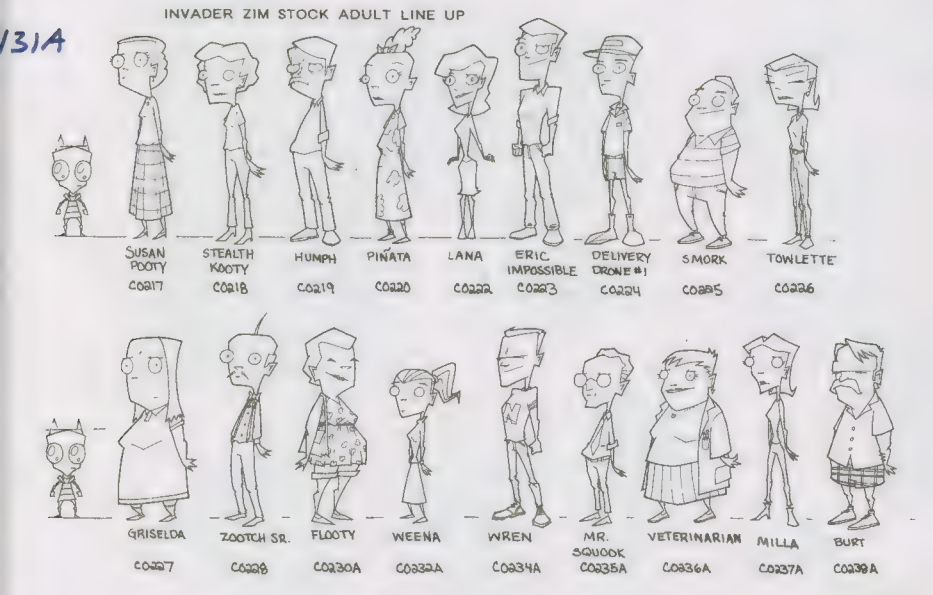
131A

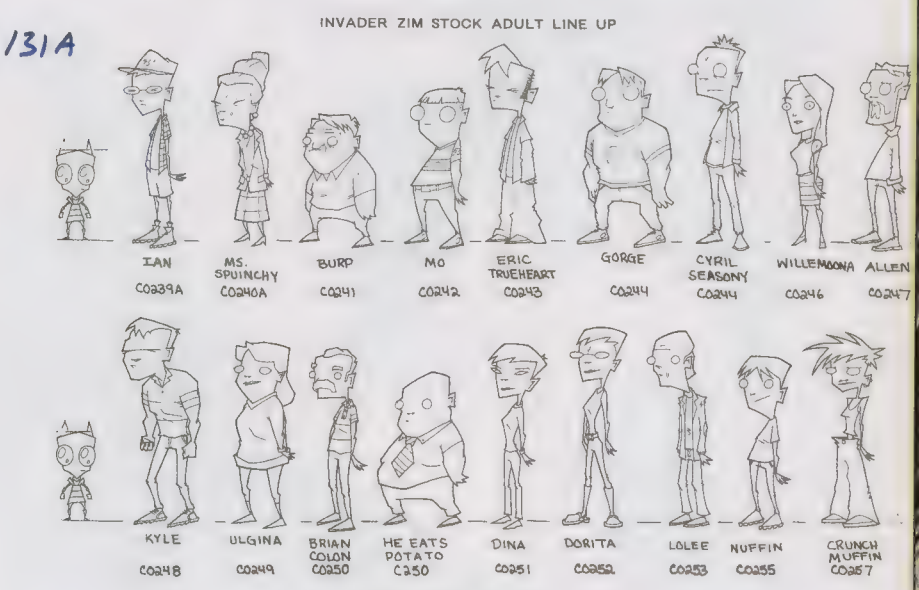
INVADER ZIM STOCK ADULT LINE UP

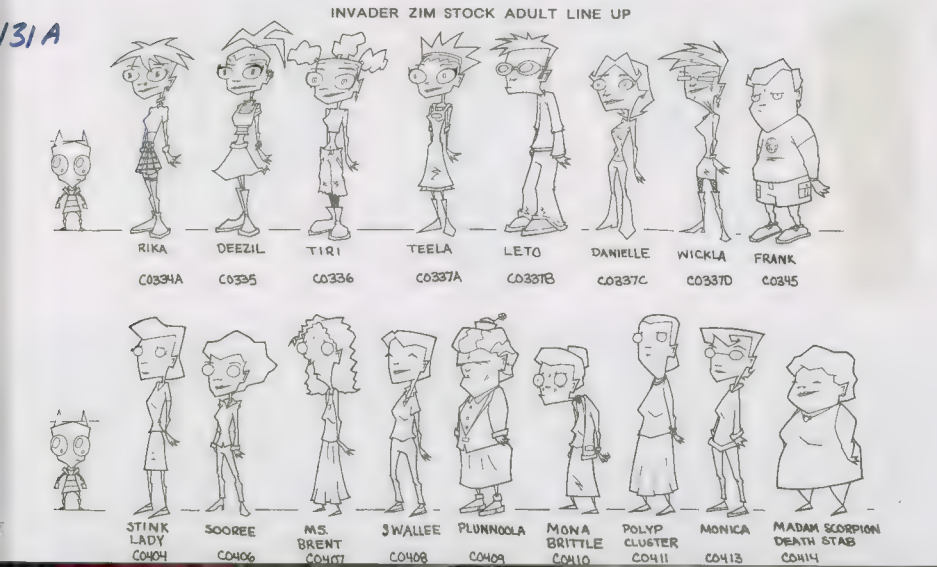


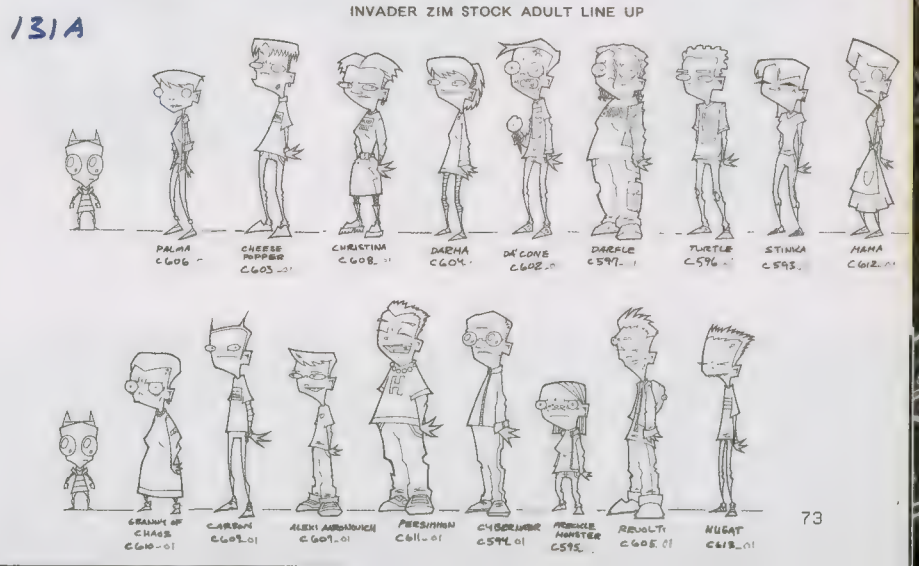

SHMUNCKY 999_C316
CORN DOGGY 999_C317
RUNK 999_C318
X-TREM GEE 999_C319
LADY 999_C320
PRINCE OF DARKNESS 999_C321
PRINCESS OF DARKNESS 999_C322
NAM 999_C323
RUBE HIMMEZ 999_C324
STANK 999_C325
SUMMER 999_C326
ALEXO 999_C327
FAITH 999_C328
BRATER OF FLESH 999_C329
SMUG 999_C330


131A
C0420K KNIT
C0420J GURG
C0420I MANDY
C0420H LOO LOO
C0420G BLANK
C0420F ALLIGATOR BACK
C0420E TRAVIS
C0420D HERMAN
C0420C WOOLLA
C0420B YIPPY
C0420A VINDA
C0446 MAGNUS
C0444 HEEF
C0443 GRANNY
C0445 MODLISSA
C0447 JACKY
C0422 YUCK
C0423 BLAH


131A
INVADER ZIM STOCK ADULT LINE UP
SUSAN POOTY C0217
STEALTH KOOTY C0218
HUMPH C0219
PIÑATA C0220
LANA C0222
ERIC IMPOSSIBLE C0223
DELIVERY DRONE #1 C0224
SMORK C0225
TOWLETTE C0226
GRISELDA C0227
ZOOTCH SR. C0228
FLOOTY C0230A
WEENA C0232A
WREN C0234A
MR. SQUOOK C0235A
VETERINARIAN C0236A
MILLA C0237A
BURT C0238A


131A
INVADER ZIM STOCK ADULT LINE UP
IAN C0239A
MS. SPUINCHY C0240A
BURP C0241
MO C0242
ERIC TRUEHEART C0243
GORGE C0244
CYRIL SEASONY C0244
WILLEMOONA C0246
ALLEN C0247
KYLE C0248
ULGINA C0249
BRIAN COLON C0250
HE EATS POTATO C250
DINA C0251
DORITA C0252
LOLEE C0253
NUFFIN C0255
CRUNCH MUFFIN C0257


131A
INVADER ZIM STOCK ADULT LINE UP
RIKA C0334A
DEEZIL C0335
TIRI C0336
TEELA C0337A
LETO C0337B
DANIELLE C0337C
WICKLA C0337D
FRANK C0345
STINK LADY C0404
SOOREE C0406
MS. BRENT C0407
SWALLEE C0408
PLUNNOOLA C0409
MONA BRITTLE C0410
POLYP CLUSTER C0411
MONICA C0413
MADAM SCORPION DEATH STAB C0414

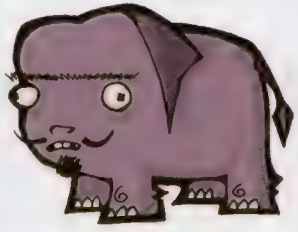

131A
INVADER ZIM STOCK ADULT LINE UP
PALMA C606
CHEESE POPPER C603
CHRISTINA C608
DARMA C604
DA'CONE C602
DARPLE C597
TURTLE C596
STINKA C593
MAMA C612
GRANNY OF CHAOS C610-01
CARBON C609_01
ALIEN ARMADILLO C609-01
PERSIMMON C611-01
CYBERLOVER C594 01
FRECKLE MONSTER C595
REVOLTA C605 01
NUGAT C613-01

ALIEN FAMILY

C006 RESISTY ALIEN 2.

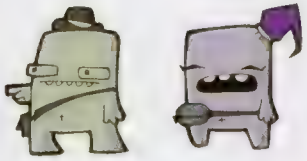
C004 PIGBOY.

C007 GERM, LERM, SHERM, AND DERM



C002 ALIEN BABY ELEPHANT.

C009 DOOKIE BEAST

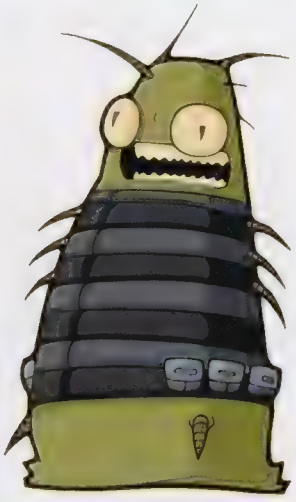


C008 BLOWDIGGLE AND BLOWDIGGLA.

C001 ALIEN BABIES.

ERIC THE BLOB

C017 SPJDKNICKLE



C015 WAPPSY.

C016 SHLOONKTAPOOXIS.

C012 DAS KLOWNEN

C018 STRESSRELIEVA.

C019 THROBULATARA.

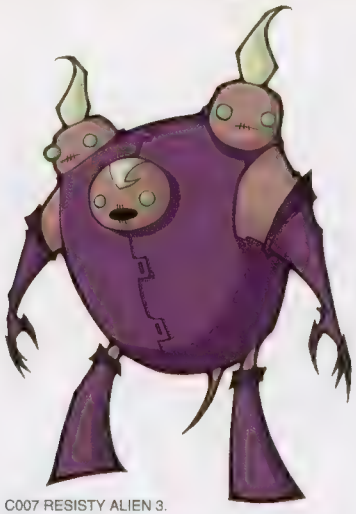
C010 ALIEN RODENT.

C020 UGLOO

C008 RESISTY ALIEN 4.

C027 MOMULOR

C005 RESISTY ALIEN 1



C007 RESISTY ALIEN 3.

C001 BRAIN PARASITE.

REAR

C004 PRISONER 777 VORT ENGINEER

C011 BOOTH12.

S001 SIZZLOR IN BACKPACK AND SPACE SUIT

C012 RESISTY ALIEN 8.

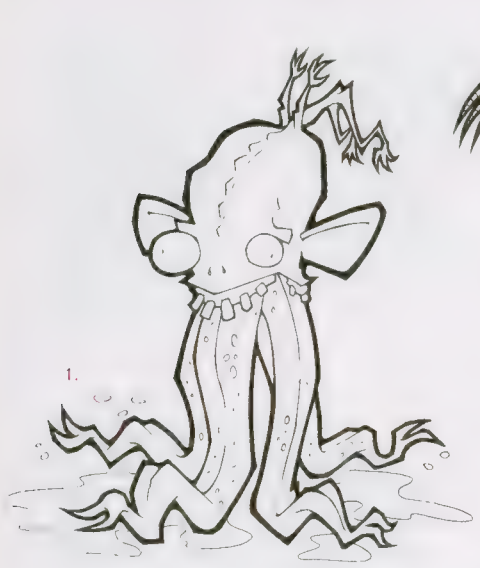
C026 KIDLOR

C009 RESISTY ALIEN 5.

C011 RESISTY ALIEN 7.

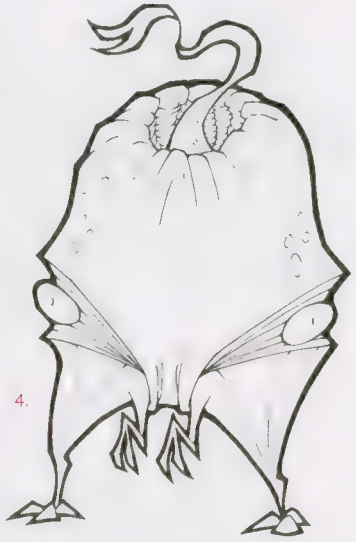
C010 RESISTY ALIEN 6.

This spread: A sampling of alien designs from the *Zim* universe, including Eric the Blob and Sizz-Lorr (in backpack and space suit) from the episode "The Frycook What Came from All That Space" (EP26), and a variety of Resisty Aliens and Zim's gigantic Brain Parasite from the episode "Backseat Drivers from Beyond the Stars" (EP21).


1.

2.

3.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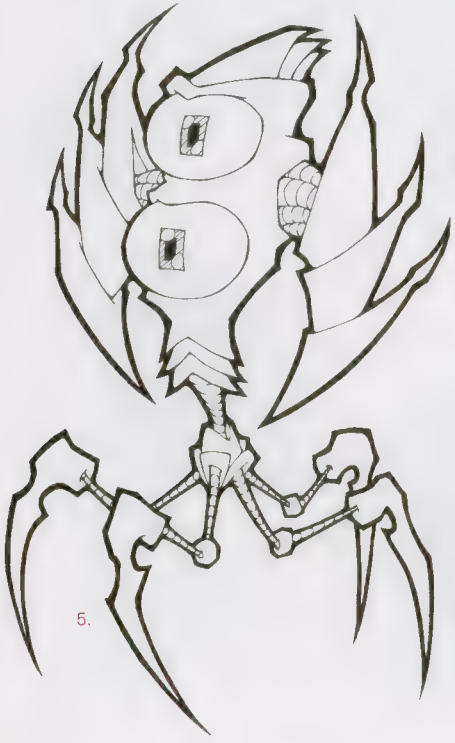
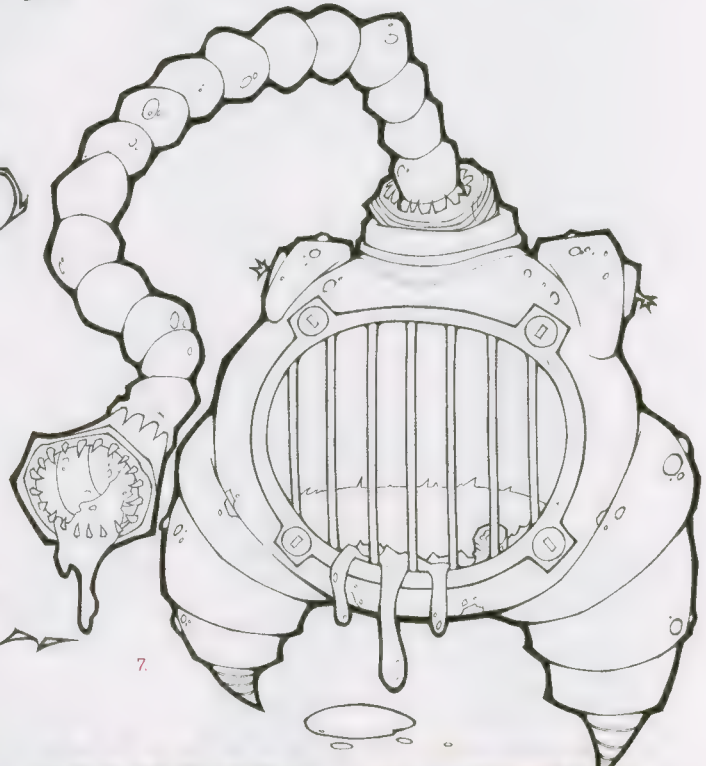
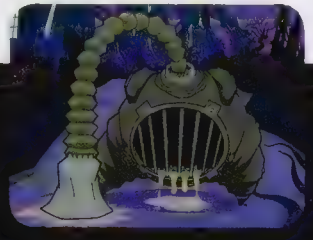
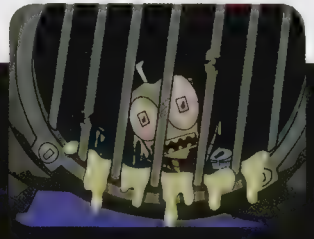
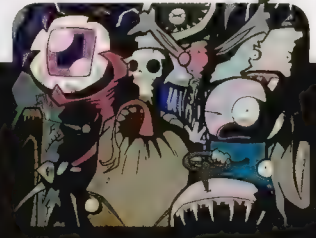

5.

6.


7.



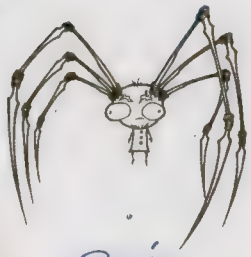




This spread: The episode "Halloween Spectacular of Spooky Doom" (EP14) required many new monster designs to be created that were specific to this single episode. Depicted above are 1 Droogle, 2 Simon Rikkis (a play on Rikki Simons, series color designer and voice of Gir), 3 Ralphie, 4 Poofter, 5 Insect Related Beast Thingy 2, 6 Bride of Mortis, 7 unnamed creature, 8 Oraface, 9 Puncher of Heads, 10 unnamed creature, 11 Bobby Joe Ray Billy Sue, 12 unnamed creature, 13 Ouchmaster 5000, 14 unnamed creature, and 15 Giggles.

HOLLOWEEN MONSTER NAME QUICK REFERENCE.

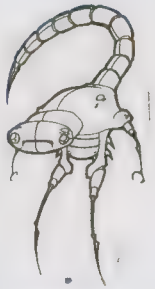
HUMMELFLESH



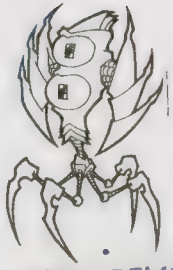
PEPE

BOBBY JOE
RAY BILLY SUE

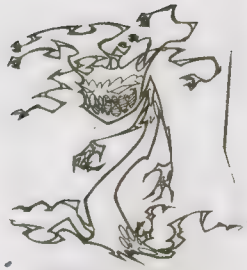
SIMON RIKKIS



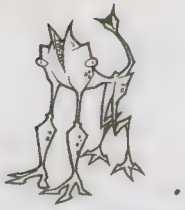
MR. PINCHY



INSECT RELATED
BEAST THINGY 2



BRIDE OF
MORTIS



RALFIE

GIGGLES

ORAFACE

THE ENIGMA

YOLK

DROOGLE

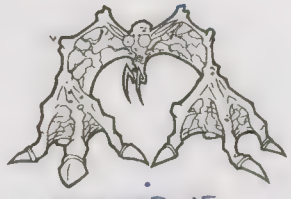
THE SLOBULATOR

OCULORD

OUCHMASTER
5000

POOFTER

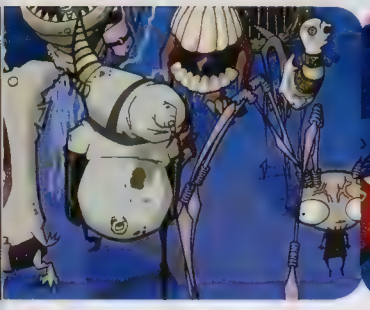
THE ADMIRAL

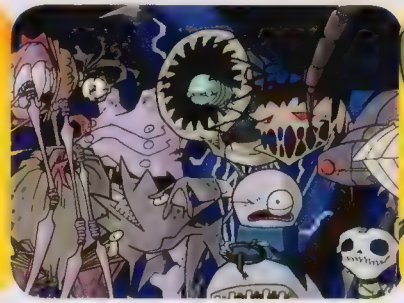


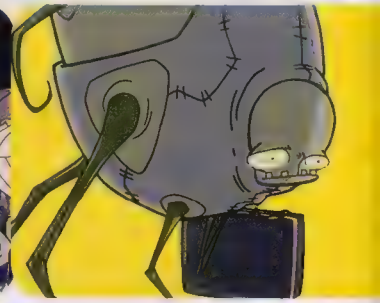
PUNCHER OF
HEADS

GORDON
PETERSON

GORDON
PETERSON
JR.



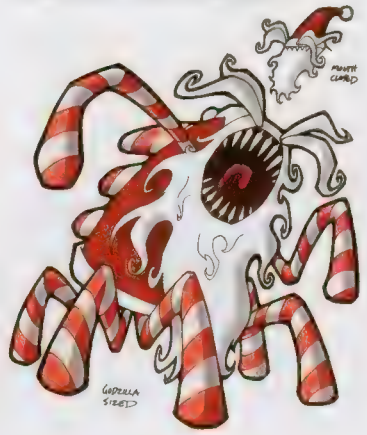




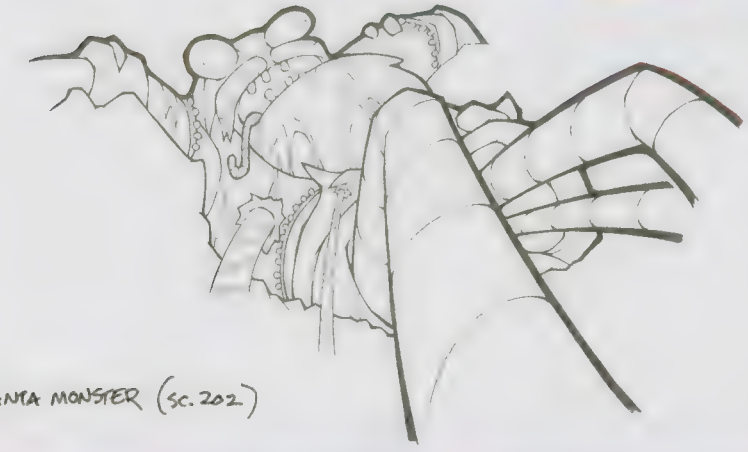
ENORMOUS TERRIFYING SANTA WHAT FIGHTS DIB IN HIS MECHA SUIT.

INCIDENTAL CHARACTER
MONSTER SANTA
SC # 161
serial # 131A_C005

131A INCIDENTAL CHARACTER
SUPER GIANT MUTATED SANTA

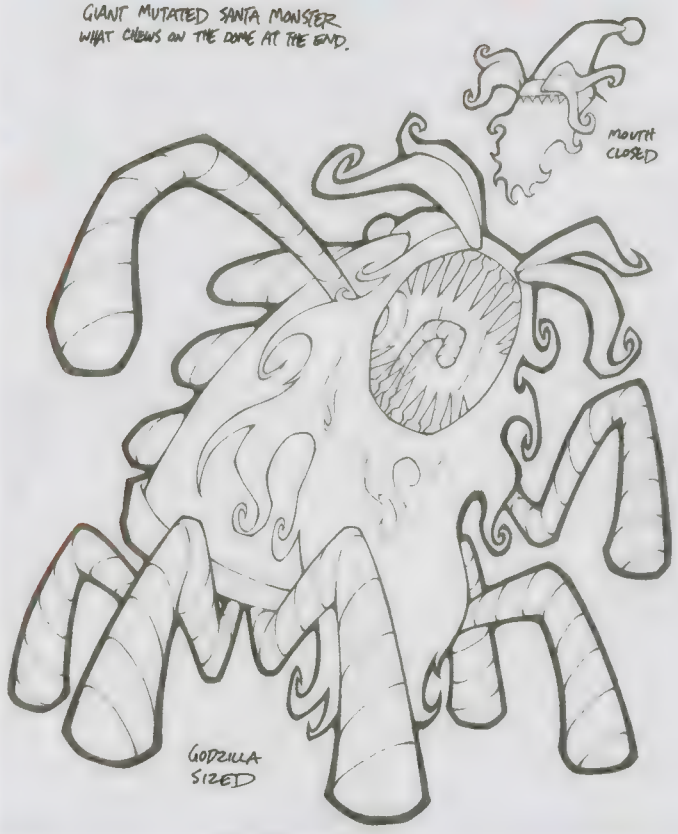


INCIDENTAL CHARACTER
LITTLE SANTA CREATURE
131A
BC # 206
serial # 131A_0004



BROKED SANTA MONSTER (SC. 202)

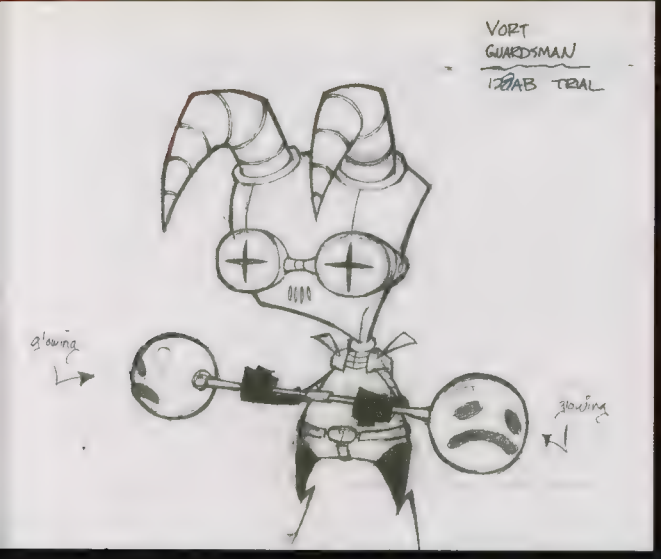
GIANT MUTATED SANTA MONSTER WHAT CHEWS ON THE DOME AT THE END.

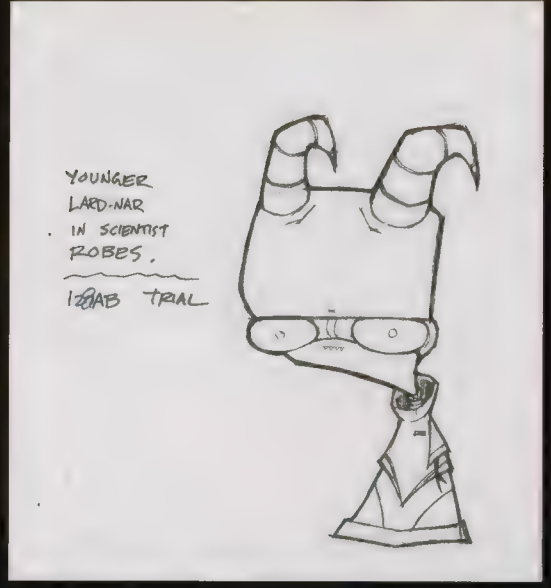


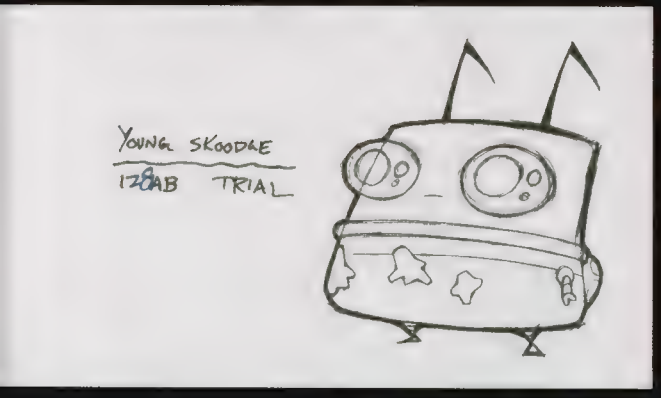
Opposite: Monsters from the previous spread and more are named on the Halloween Monster Name Quick Reference sheet above, a fascinating production artifact unto itself from the episode "Halloween Spectacular of Spooky Doom" (EP14).

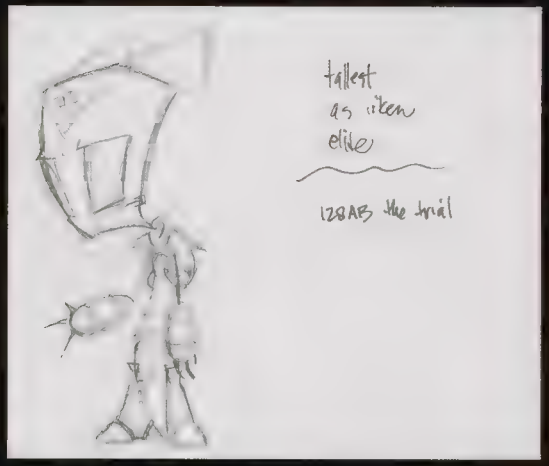
Above: Monster Santa and super Giant Mutated Santa hail from the extra special episode "The Most Horrible X-Mas Ever" (EP27).

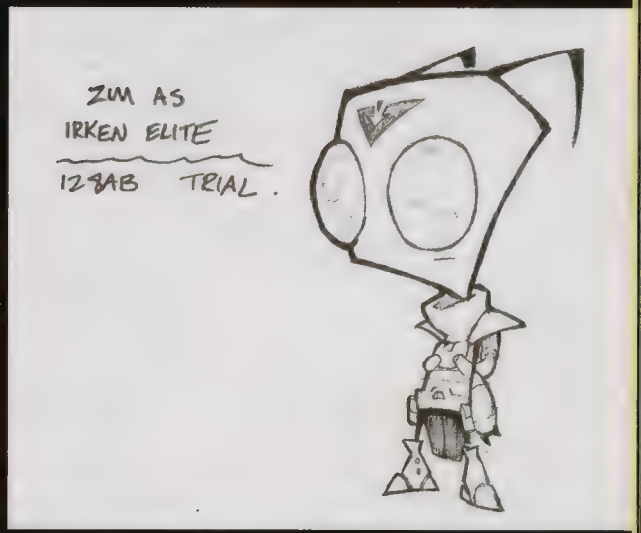
CHARACTER DESIGNS: THE TRIAL

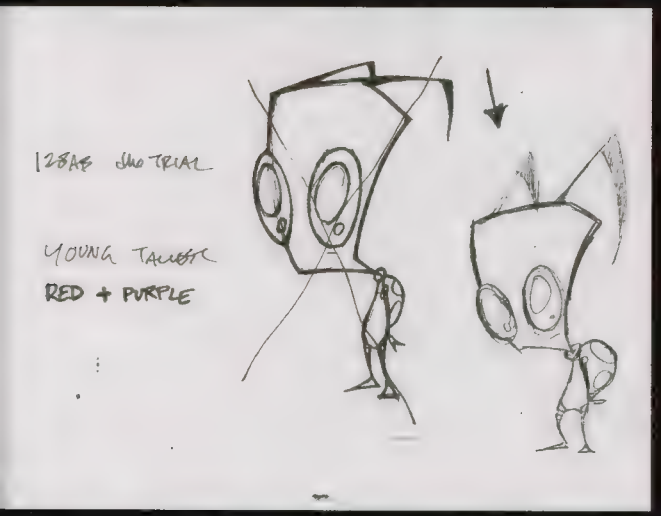


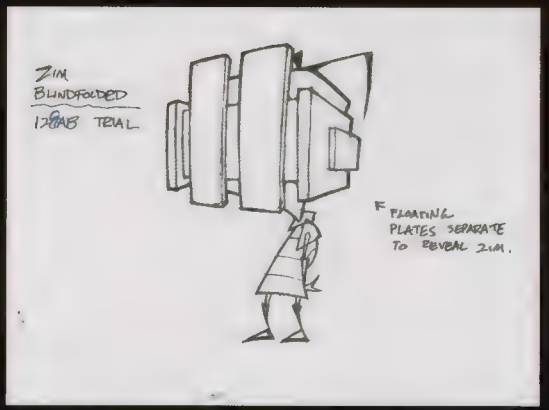












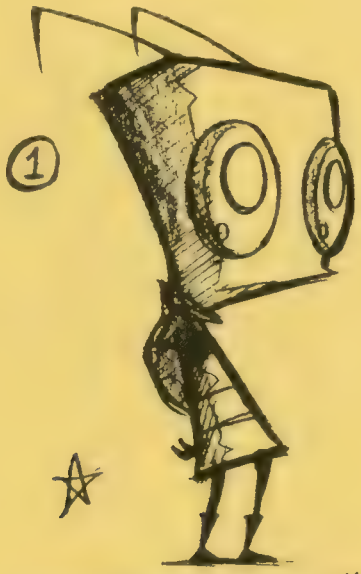
This spread: One of the two unfinished episodes that was partially developed when the series was cancelled was called "The Trial." Zim is brought before the Control Brain for his Existence Evaluation by the Almighty Tallest and faces the possibility of being deemed defective and erased from history. Above are some of the character designs from this unfinished episode including several scientists, monsters, young versions of the Tallest, Tallest Miyuki, and Zim in a variety of costumes.

CHARACTER ATTITUDE REFERENCE GUIDE (NOT AN OFFICIAL MODEL PACK)

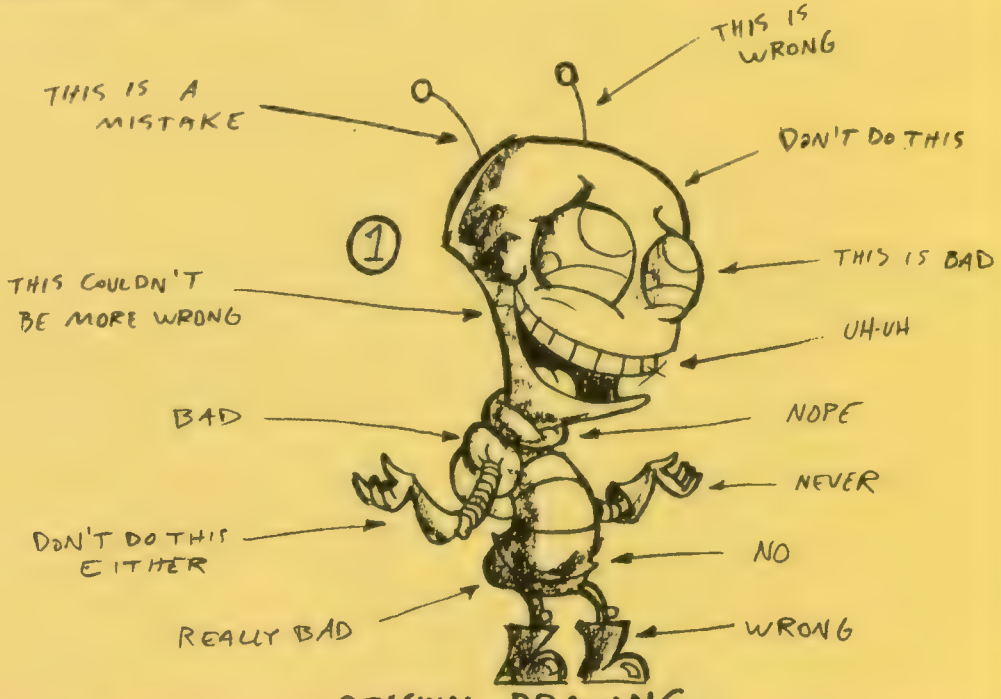
SOME NICKELODEON PRESS DEPARTMENT ARTISTS SENT THE FOLLOWING DRAWINGS AS ATTEMPTS AT LEARNING THE INVADER ZIM STYLE. I QUICKLY WENT OVER THE DRAWINGS WITH OVERLAYS, AND MADE NOTES ON THEIR DRAWINGS ON WHATEVER ISSUE NEEDED ADDRESSING.

AGAIN, THESE "CORRECTIONS" WERE DONE WITH HASTE, AND AS A RESULT, THEY AREN'T THE MOST ON-MODEL DRAWINGS OF ZIM AND FRIENDS — HOWEVER, THROUGH COMPARISON, THIS CAN BE A HELPFUL REFERENCE GUIDE FOR ... CHARACTER ATTITUDES .. JUST LIKE IT SAYS AT THE TOP OF THE PAGE.

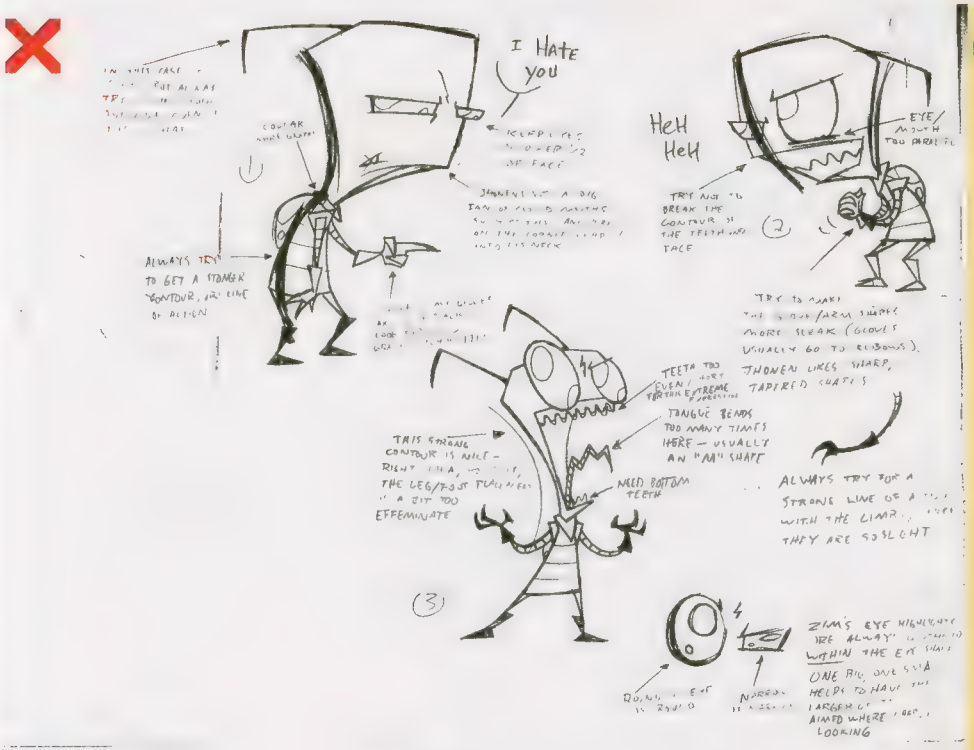
THIS IS HOW IT WORKS:

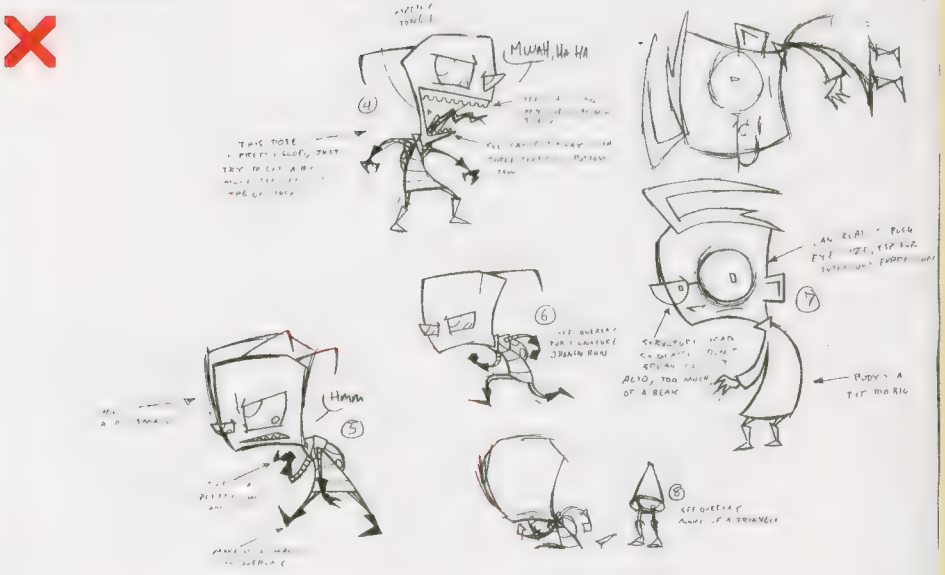


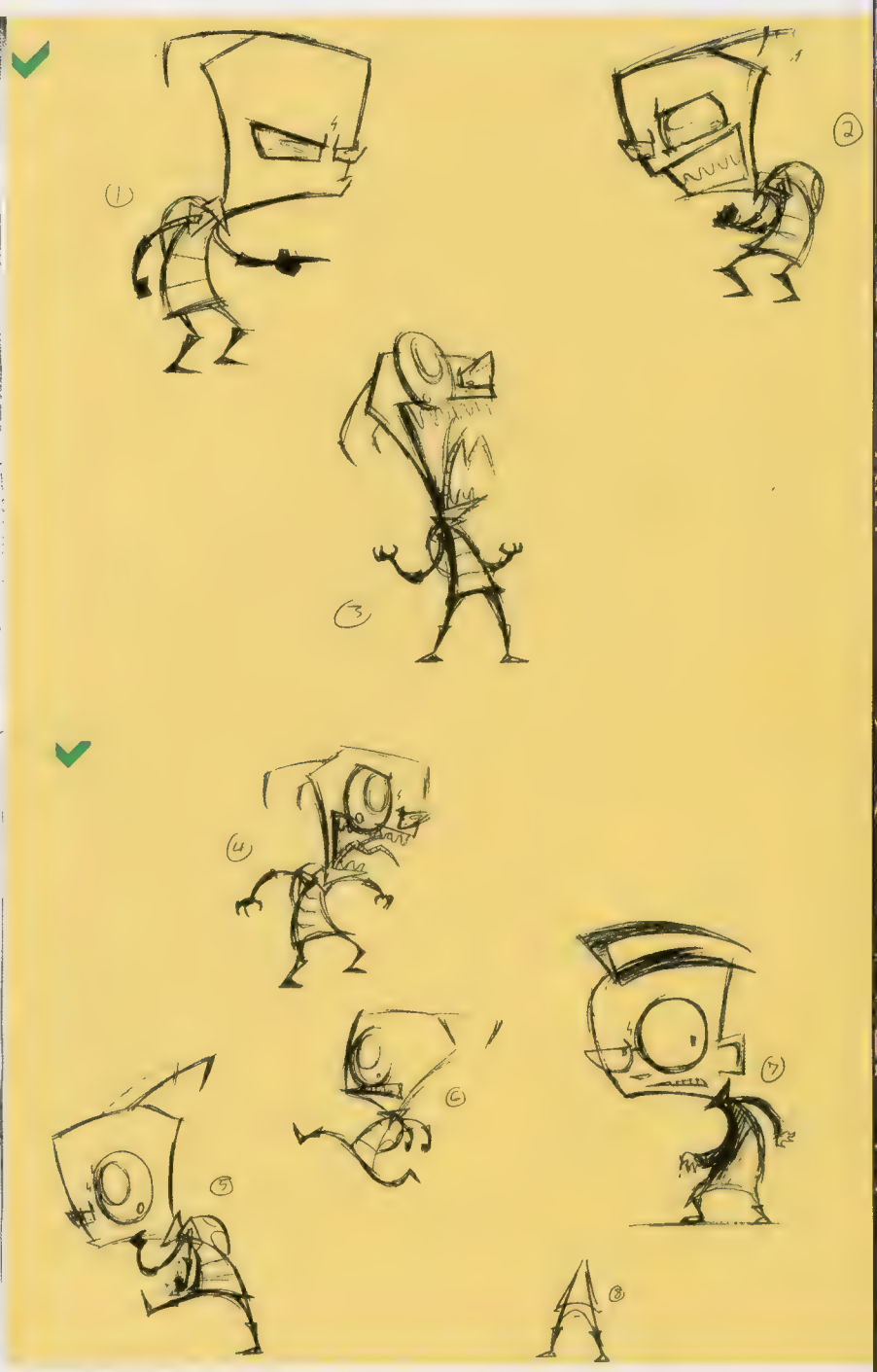
MY "CORRECTION"



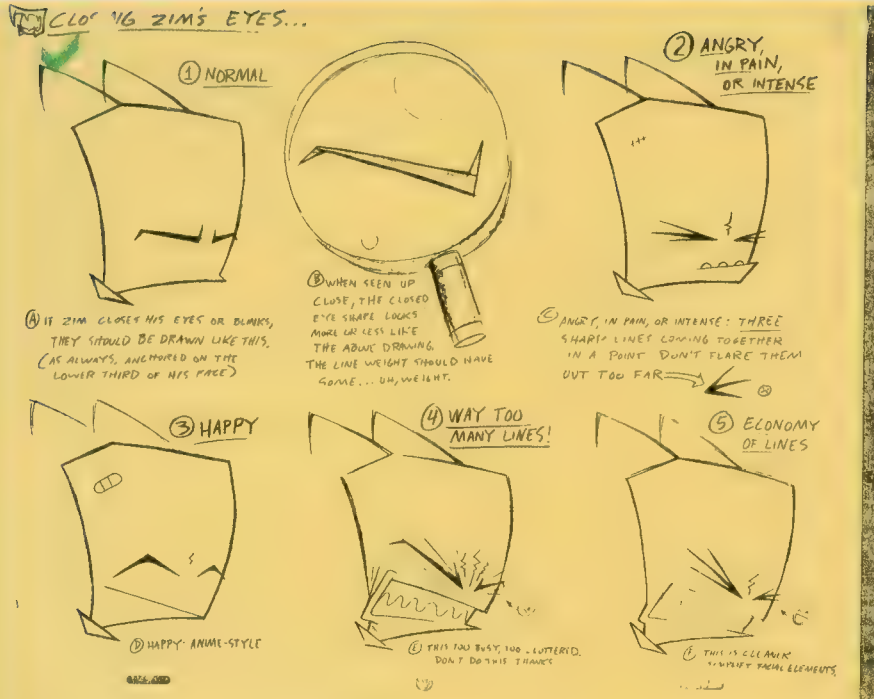
ORIGINAL DRAWING

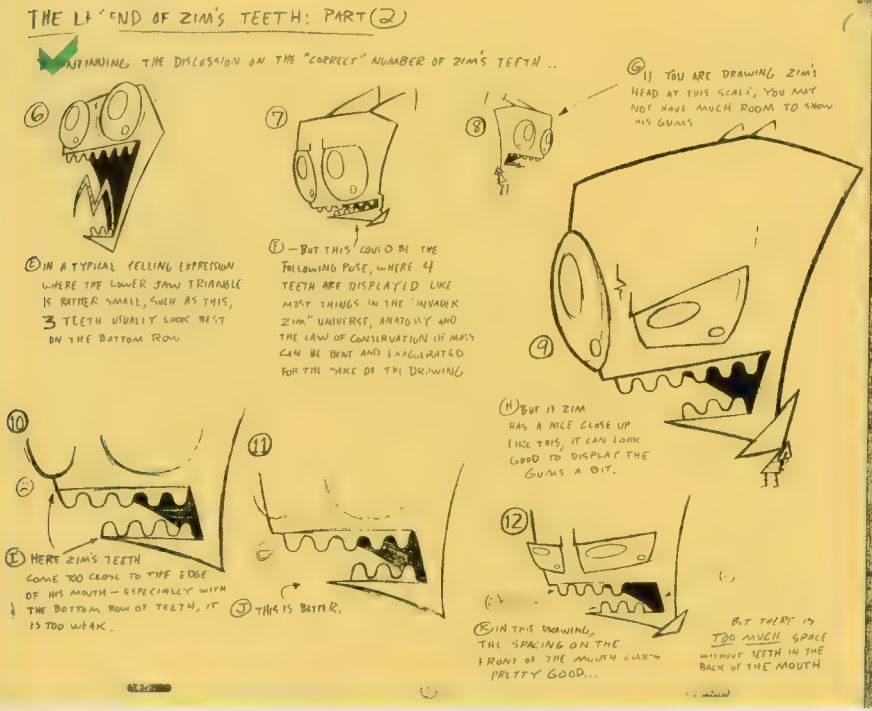


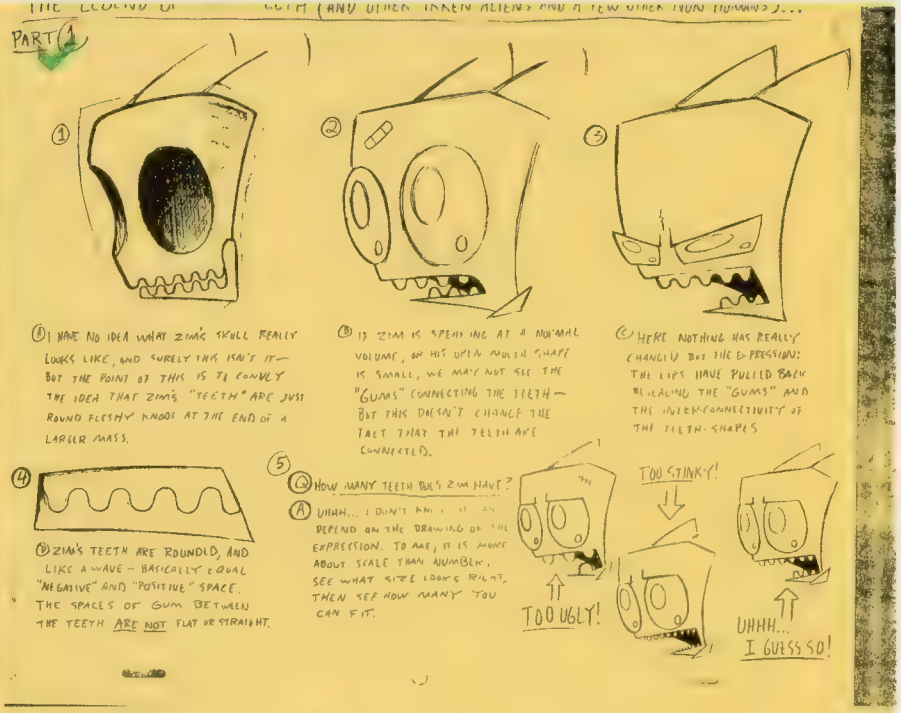


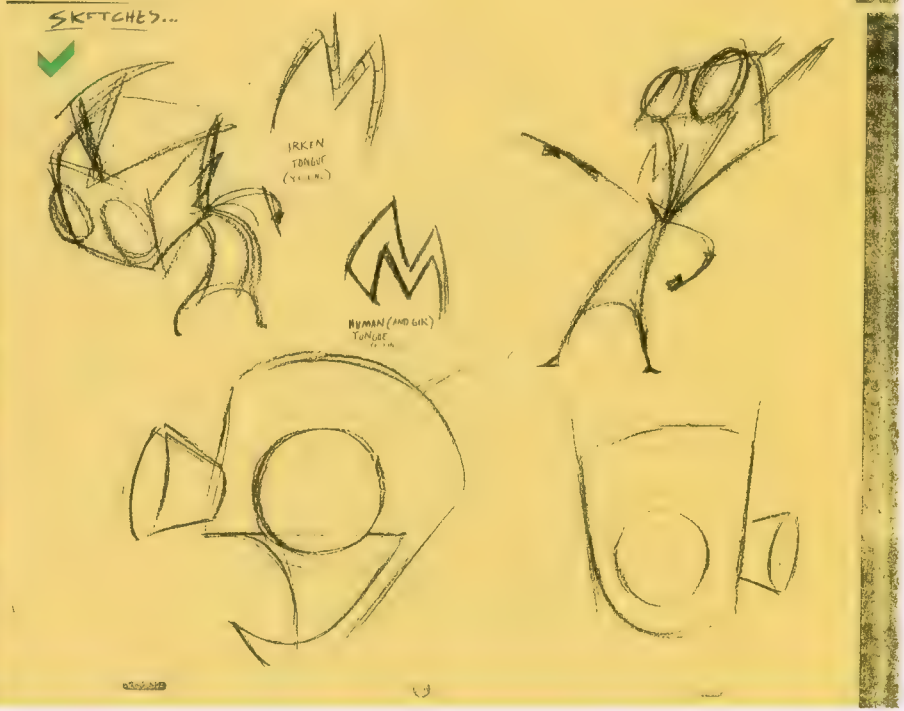


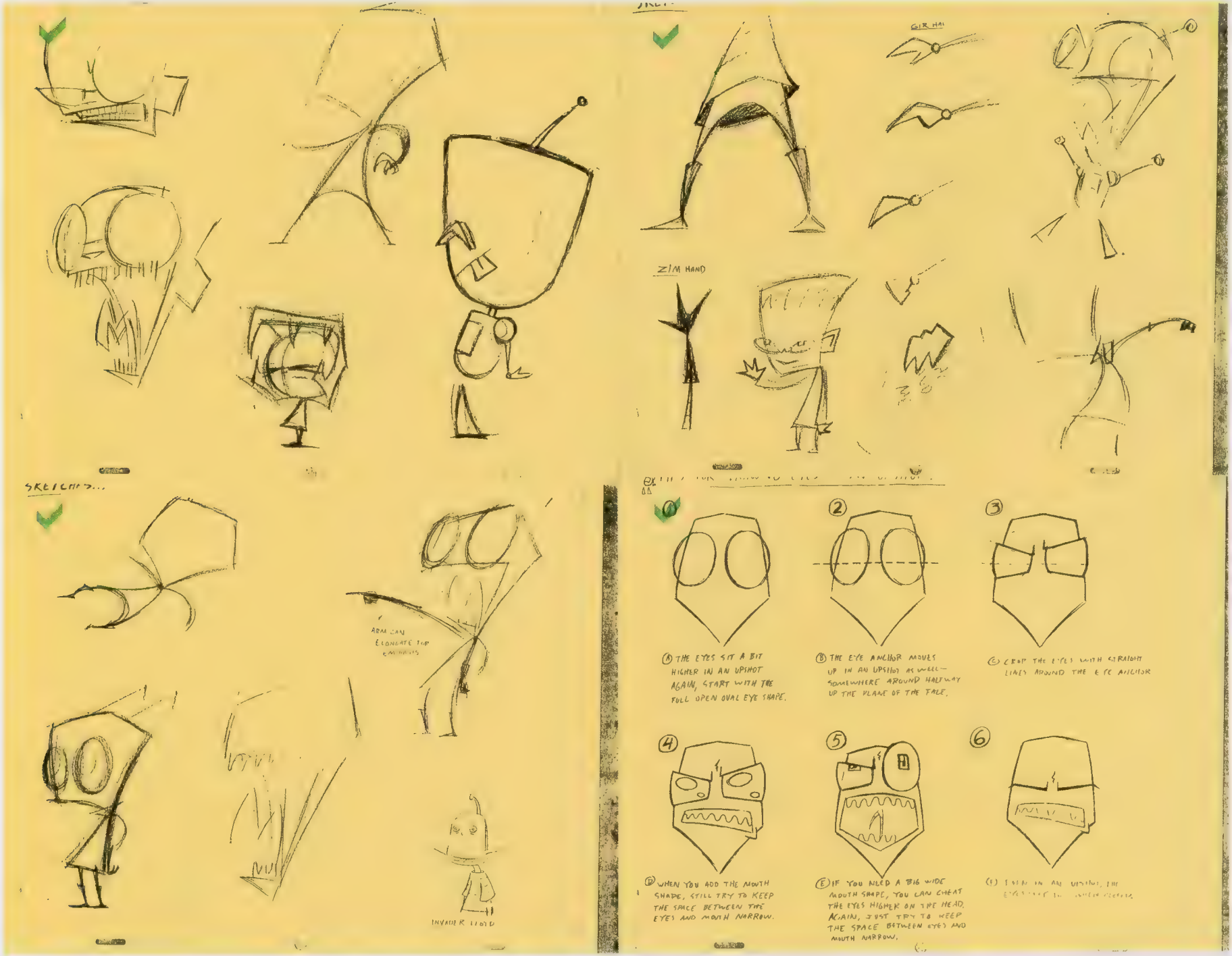
This spread: Bryan Konietzko created pages of reference material for other artists within Nickelodeon so that they could better execute the signature *Zim* style in their promotional materials. It's a study of how subtle variations in drawn character details make all the difference.


CLOSING ZIM'S EYES...
1 NORMAL
2 ANGRY, IN PAIN, OR INTENSE
3 HAPPY
4 WAY TOO MANY LINES!
5 ECONOMY OF LINES
A IF ZIM CLOSES HIS EYES OR BLINKS, THEY SHOULD BE DRAWN LIKE THIS. (AS ALWAYS, ANCHORED ON THE LOWER THIRD OF HIS FACE)
B WHEN SEEN UP CLOSE, THE CLOSED EYE SHAPE LOOKS MORE OR LESS LIKE THE ABOVE DRAWING. THE LINE WEIGHT SHOULD HAVE SOME... UH, WEIGHT.
C ANGRY, IN PAIN, OR INTENSE: THREE SHARP LINES COMING TOGETHER IN A POINT. DON'T FLARE THEM OUT TOO FAR
D HAPPY: ANIME-STYLE
E THIS TOO BUSY, TOO CLUTTERED. DON'T DO THIS THANKS
F THIS IS CLEARLY SUFFICIENT FACIAL ELEMENTS

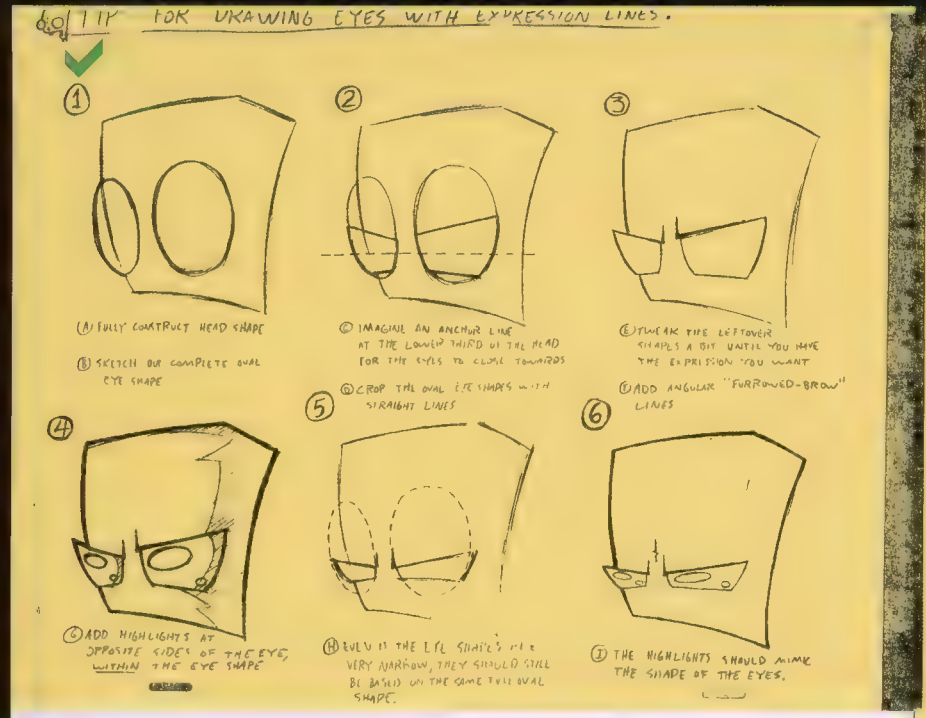

THE LEGEND OF ZIM'S TEETH: PART (2)
CONTINUING THE DISCUSSION ON THE "CORRECT" NUMBER OF ZIM'S TEETH..
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
E IN A TYPICAL YELLING EXPRESSION WHERE THE LOWER JAW TRIANGLE IS RATHER SMALL, SUCH AS THIS, 3 TEETH USUALLY LOOK BEST ON THE BOTTOM ROW.
F — BUT THIS COULD BE THE FOLLOWING POSE, WHERE 4 TEETH ARE DISPLAYED. LIKE MOST THINGS IN THE "INVADER ZIM" UNIVERSE, ANATOMY AND THE LAW OF CONSERVATION OF MASS CAN BE BENT AND EXAGGERATED FOR THE SAKE OF THE DRAWING.
G IF YOU ARE DRAWING ZIM'S HEAD AT THIS SCALE, YOU MAY NOT HAVE MUCH ROOM TO SHOW HIS GUMS
H BUT IF ZIM HAS A NICE CLOSE UP LIKE THIS, IT CAN LOOK GOOD TO DISPLAY THE GUMS A BIT.
I HERE ZIM'S TEETH COME TOO CLOSE TO THE EDGE OF HIS MOUTH — ESPECIALLY WITH THE BOTTOM ROW OF TEETH, IT IS TOO WEAK.
J THIS IS BETTER.
K IN THIS DRAWING, THE SPACING ON THE FRONT OF THE MOUTH LOOKS PRETTY GOOD...
BUT THERE IS TOO MUCH SPACE WITHOUT TEETH IN THE BACK OF THE MOUTH

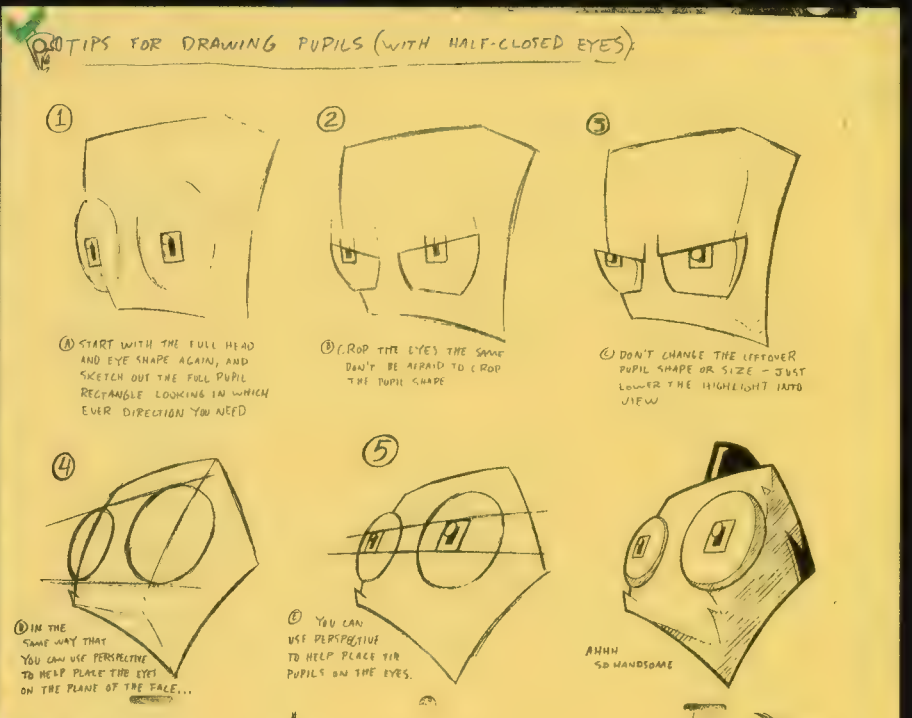

THE LEGEND OF ZIM'S TEETH (AND OTHER IRKEN ALIENS AND A FEW OTHER NON-HUMANS)...
PART (1)
1
2
3
4
5
A I HAVE NO IDEA WHAT ZIM'S SKULL REALLY LOOKS LIKE, AND SURELY THIS ISN'T IT— BUT THE POINT OF THIS IS TO CONVEY THE IDEA THAT ZIM'S "TEETH" ARE JUST ROUND FLESHY KNOBS AT THE END OF A LARGER MASS.
B IF ZIM IS SPENDING AT A NORMAL VOLUME, OR HIS OPEN MOUTH SHAPE IS SMALL, WE MAY NOT SEE THE "GUMS" CONNECTING THE TEETH— BUT THIS DOESN'T CHANGE THE FACT THAT THE TEETH ARE CONNECTED.
C HERE NOTHING HAS REALLY CHANGED BUT THE EXPRESSION: THE LIPS HAVE PULLED BACK REVEALING THE "GUMS" AND THE INTERCONNECTIVITY OF THE TEETH-SHAPES
D ZIM'S TEETH ARE ROUNDED, AND LIKE A WAVE — BASICALLY EQUAL "NEGATIVE" AND "POSITIVE" SPACE. THE SPACES OF GUM BETWEEN THE TEETH ARE NOT FLAT OR STRAIGHT.
Q HOW MANY TEETH DOES ZIM HAVE?
A UHHH... I DON'T KNOW... IT MAY DEPEND ON THE DRAWING OR THE EXPRESSION. TO ME, IT IS MORE ABOUT SCALE THAN NUMBER. SEE WHAT SIZE LOOKS RIGHT, THEN SEE HOW MANY YOU CAN FIT.
TOO UGLY!
TOO STINKY!
UHHH... I GUESS SO!

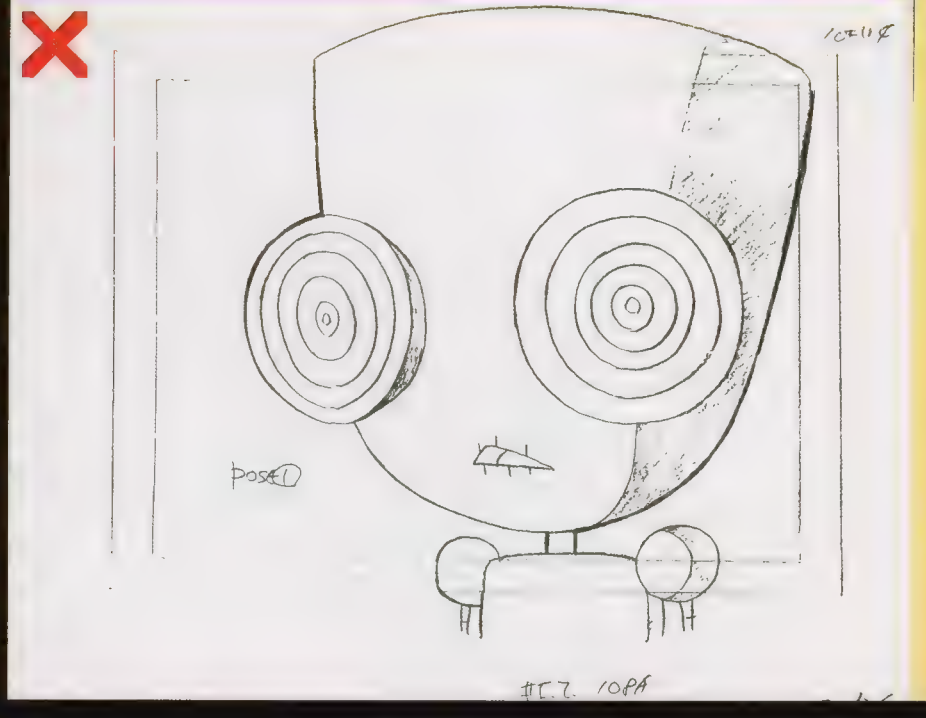

SKETCHES...
IRKEN TONGUE (YELLOW)
HUMAN (AND GIR) TONGUE

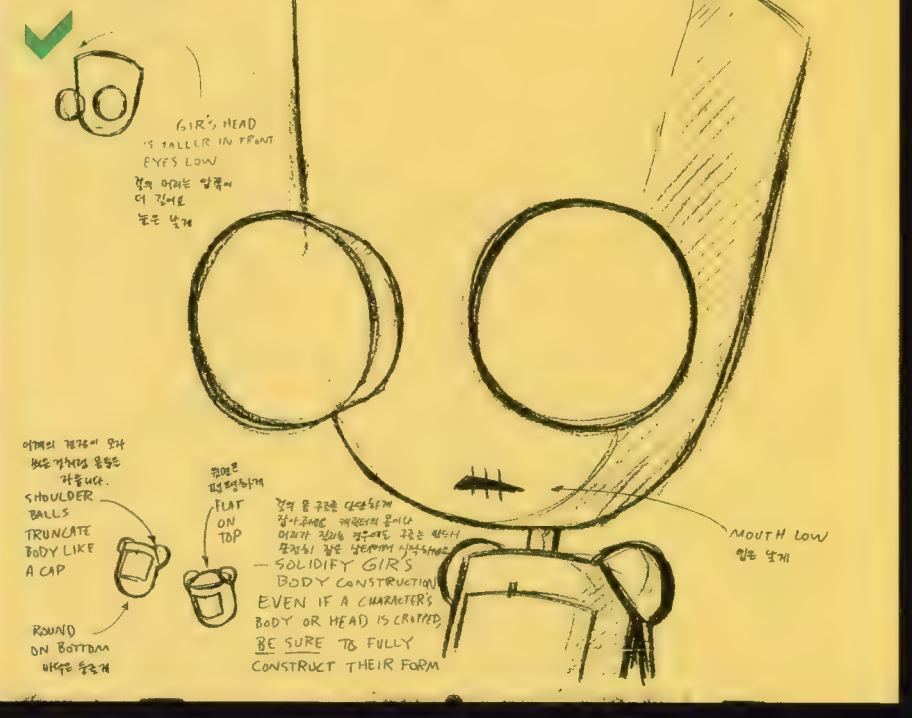


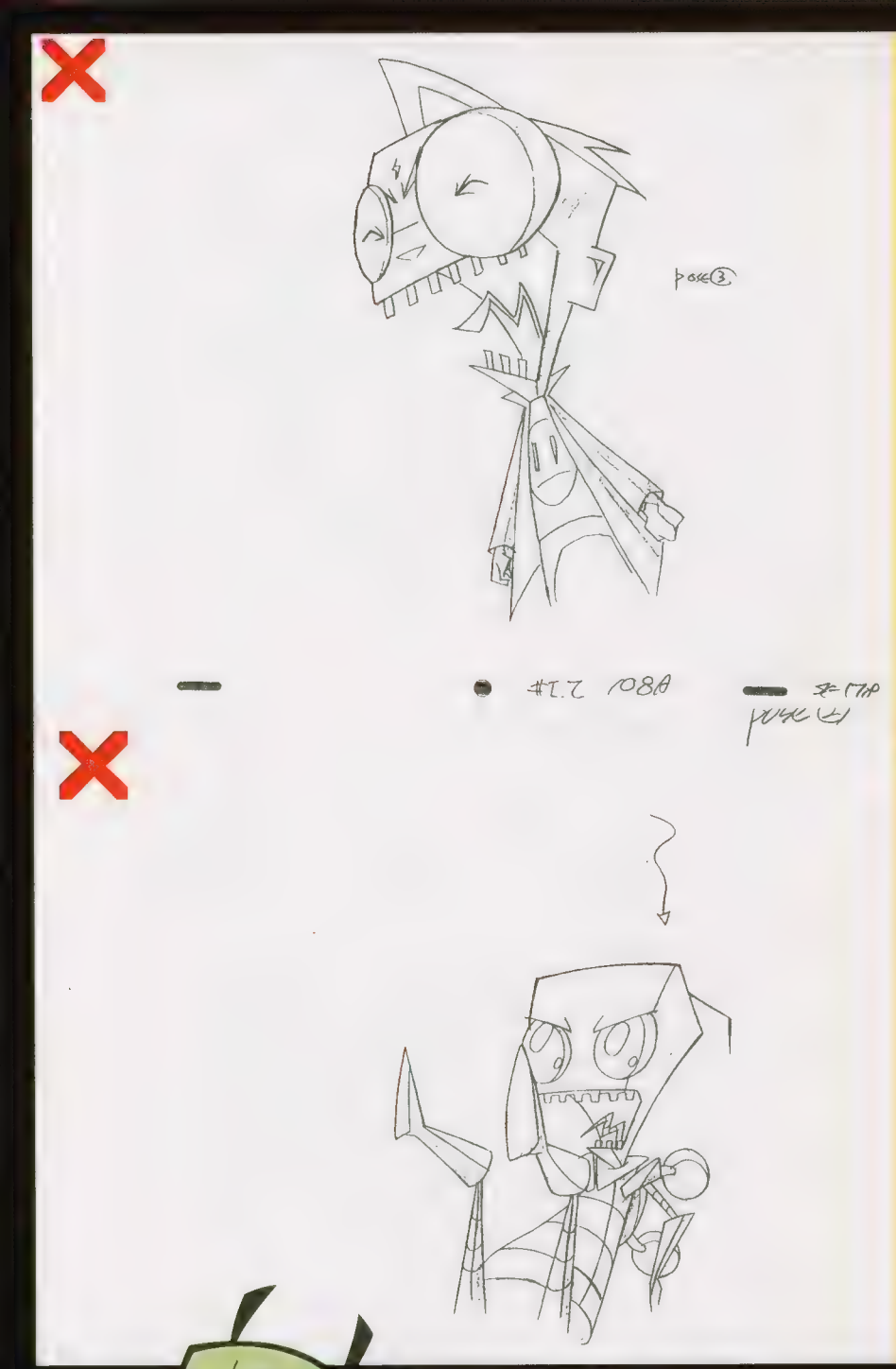
This spread: Continued selections from the character attitude reference material that Bryan Konietzko drew to help artists outside of the immediate crew.

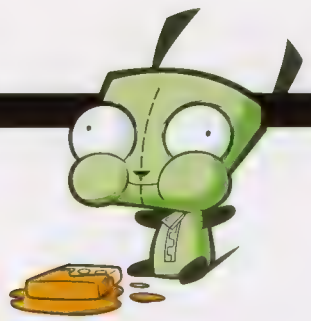

TIP FOR DRAWING EYES WITH EXPRESSION LINES.
① (A) FULLY CONSTRUCT HEAD SHAPE
(B) SKETCH OUR COMPLETE OVAL EYE SHAPE
② (C) IMAGINE AN ANCHOR LINE AT THE LOWER THIRD OF THE HEAD FOR THE EYES TO CLOSE TOWARDS
③ (E) TWEAK THE LEFTOVER SHAPES A BIT UNTIL YOU HAVE THE EXPRESSION YOU WANT
④ (F) ADD ANGULAR "FURROWED-BROW" LINES
⑤ (D) CROP THE OVAL EYE SHAPES WITH STRAIGHT LINES
⑥ (G) ADD HIGHLIGHTS AT OPPOSITE SIDES OF THE EYE, WITHIN THE EYE SHAPE
(H) EVEN IF THE EYE SHAPES ARE VERY NARROW, THEY SHOULD STILL BE BASED ON THE SAME FULL OVAL SHAPE.
(I) THE HIGHLIGHTS SHOULD MIMIC THE SHAPE OF THE EYES.


TIPS FOR DRAWING PUPILS (WITH HALF-CLOSED EYES)
① (A) START WITH THE FULL HEAD AND EYE SHAPE AGAIN, AND SKETCH OUT THE FULL PUPIL RECTANGLE LOOKING IN WHICH EVER DIRECTION YOU NEED
② (B) CROP THE EYES THE SAME DON'T BE AFRAID TO CROP THE PUPIL SHAPE
③ (C) DON'T CHANGE THE LEFTOVER PUPIL SHAPE OR SIZE - JUST LOWER THE HIGHLIGHT INTO VIEW
④ (D) IN THE SAME WAY THAT YOU CAN USE PERSPECTIVE TO HELP PLACE THE EYES ON THE PLANE OF THE FACE...
⑤ (E) YOU CAN USE PERSPECTIVE TO HELP PLACE THE PUPILS ON THE EYES.
AHHH SO HANDSOME

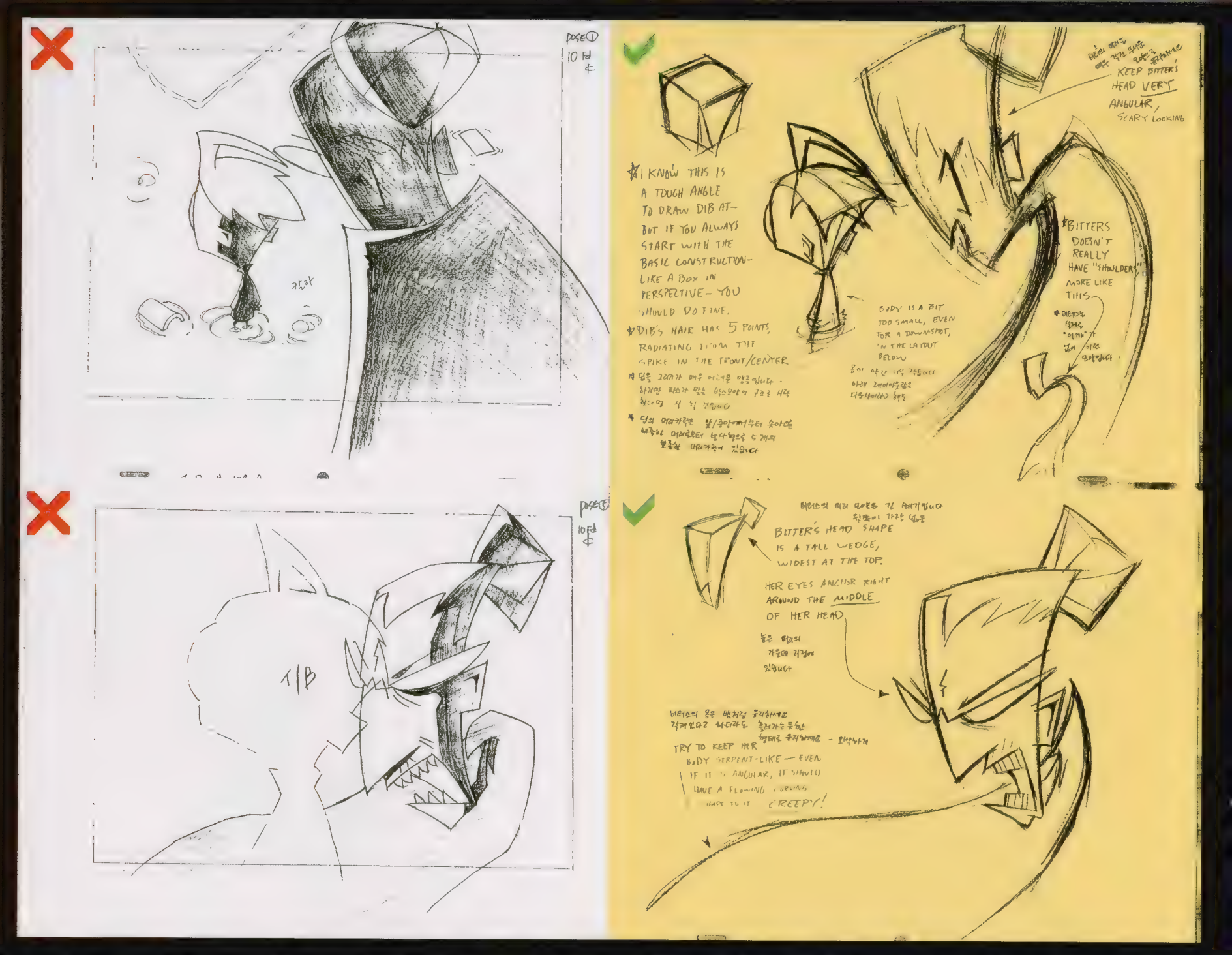

POSE 1
#E.T. 10PA

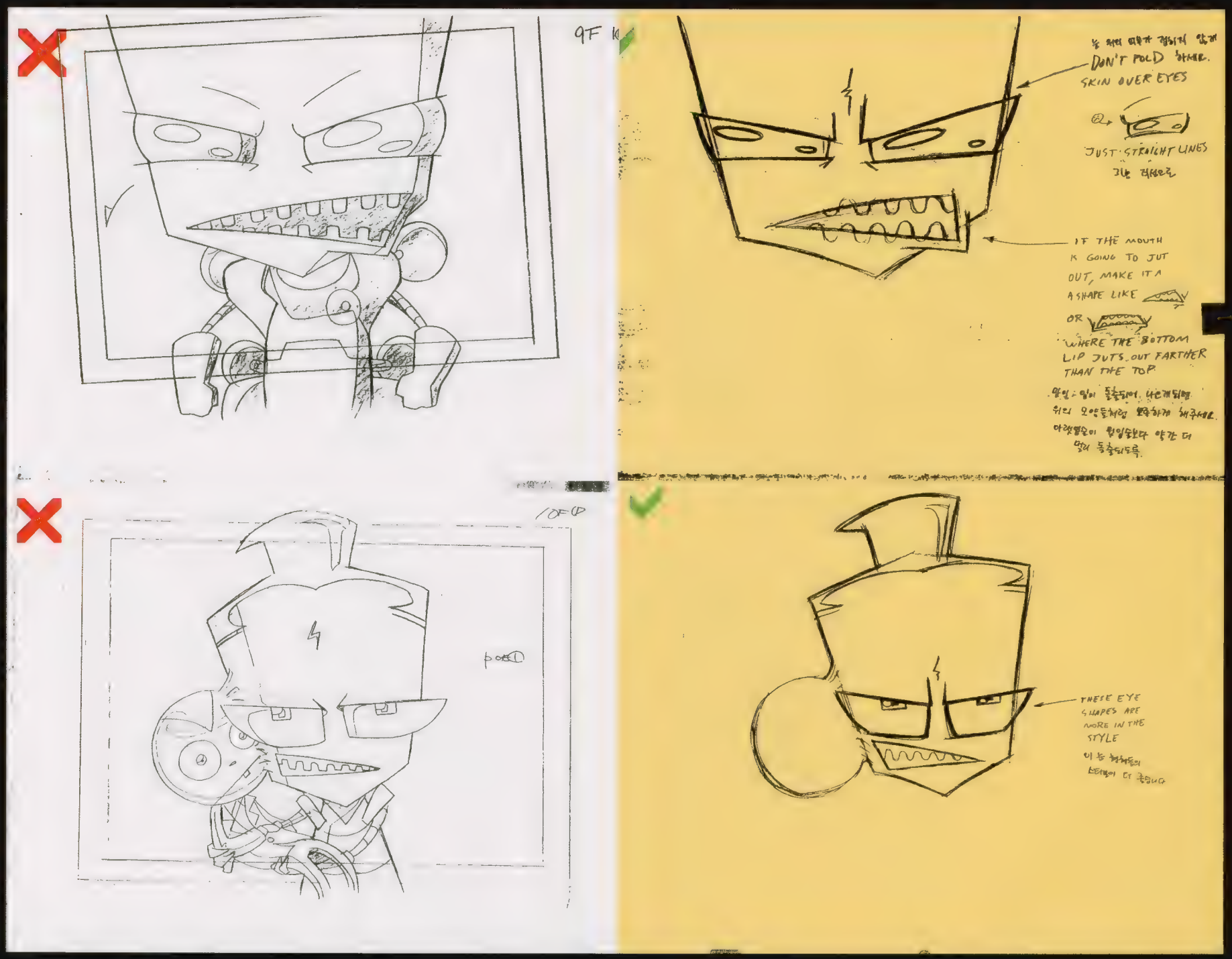

GIR'S HEAD IS TALLER IN FRONT EYES LOW
SHOULDER BALLS TRUNCATE BODY LIKE A CAP
ROUND ON BOTTOM
FLAT ON TOP
— SOLIDIFY GIR'S BODY CONSTRUCTION EVEN IF A CHARACTER'S BODY OR HEAD IS CROPPED, BE SURE TO FULLY CONSTRUCT THEIR FORM
MOUTH LOW



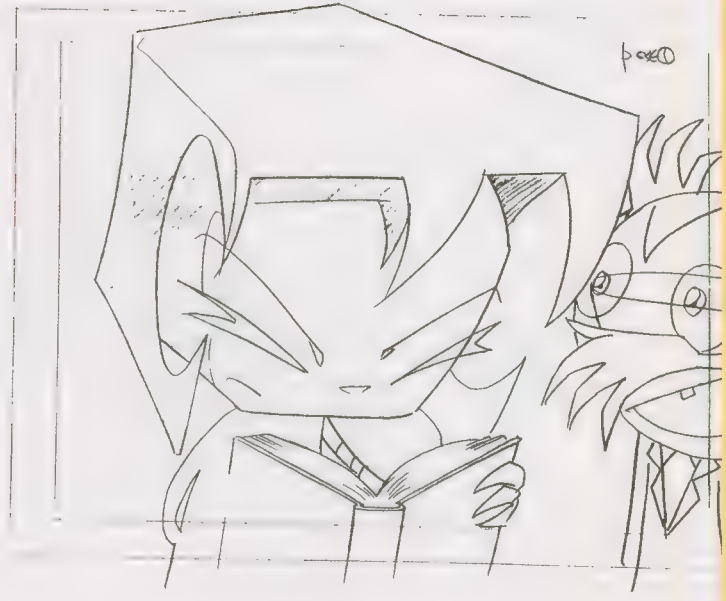


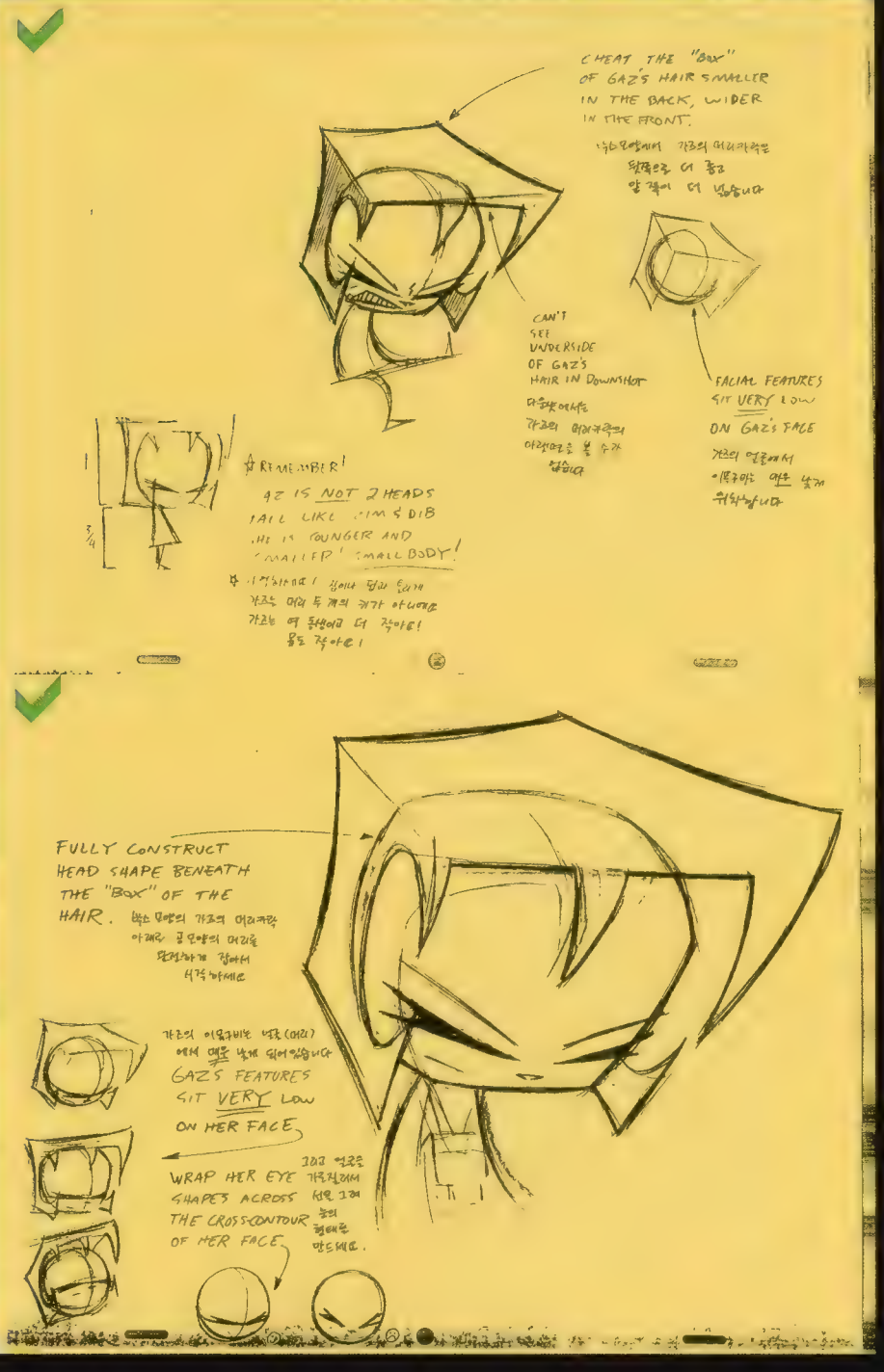
This spread: Throughout the life of the series production, Bryan Konietzko also created five volumes of the *Encyclopedia Zimtanica*, a reference guide for the animation studio. It was composed of key animation drawings that were created in the overseas studio followed by a draw-over by Bryan with notes on how to improve the attitude, construction and accuracy of the characters.

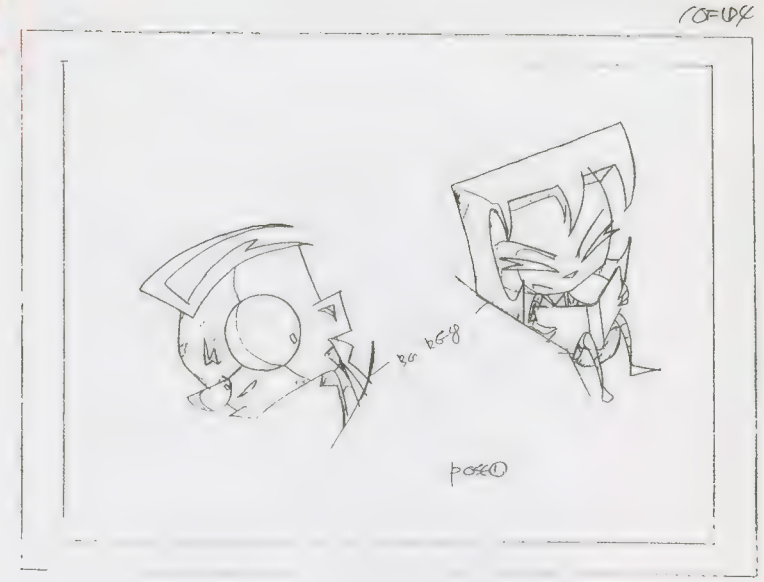

POSE①
10 Fd
POSE②
10Fd
1/B
KEEP BITTER'S HEAD VERY ANGULAR, SCARY LOOKING
★I KNOW THIS IS A TOUGH ANGLE TO DRAW DIB AT- BUT IF YOU ALWAYS START WITH THE BASIC CONSTRUCTION- LIKE A BOX IN PERSPECTIVE- YOU SHOULD DO FINE.
★DIB'S HAIR HAS 5 POINTS, RADIATING FROM THE SPIKE IN THE FRONT/CENTER
BODY IS A BIT TOO SMALL, EVEN FOR A DOWNSHOT, IN THE LAYOUT BELOW
★BITTER'S DOESN'T REALLY HAVE "SHOULDERS" MORE LIKE THIS
BITTER'S HEAD SHAPE IS A TALL WEDGE, WIDEST AT THE TOP.
HER EYES ANCHOR RIGHT AROUND THE MIDDLE OF HER HEAD
TRY TO KEEP HER BODY SERPENT-LIKE — EVEN IF IT IS ANGULAR, IT SHOULD HAVE A FLOWING QUALITY TO IT
CREEPY!

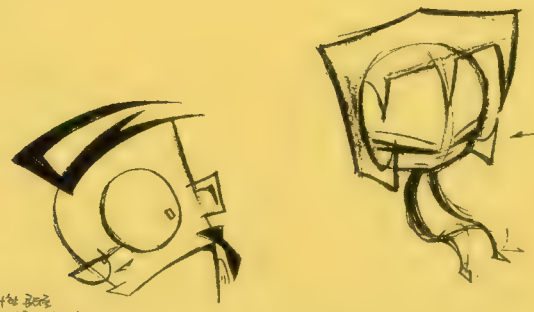


This spread: Selections from the *Encyclopedia Zimtanica* continued.



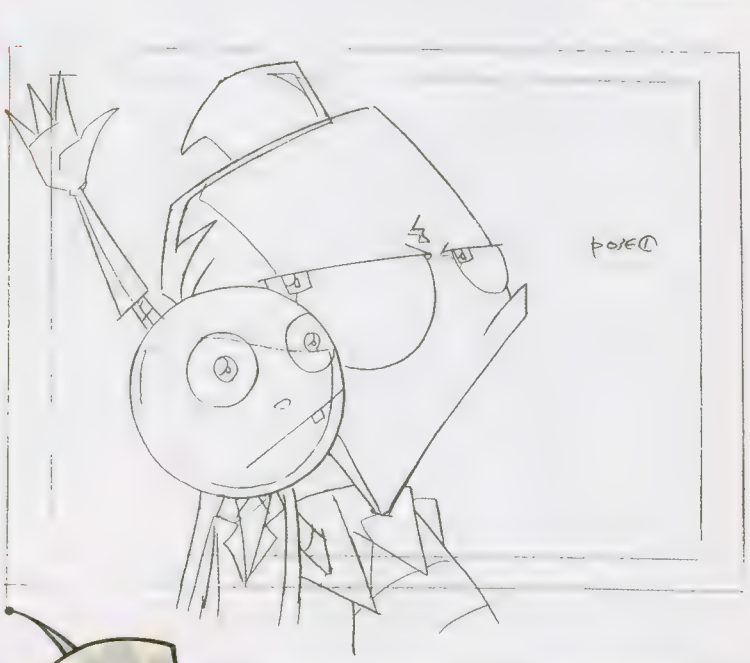

CHEAT THE "Box" OF GAZ'S HAIR SMALLER IN THE BACK, WIDER IN THE FRONT.
CAN'T SEE UNDERSIDE OF GAZ'S HAIR IN DOWNSHOT
FACIAL FEATURES SIT VERY LOW ON GAZ'S FACE
☆REMEMBER!
GAZ IS NOT 2 HEADS TALL LIKE DIM & DIB. HE IS TAUNGER AND "SMALLER" SMALL BODY!
FULLY CONSTRUCT HEAD SHAPE BENEATH THE "Box" OF THE HAIR.
GAZ'S FEATURES SIT VERY LOW ON HER FACE
WRAP HER EYE SHAPES ACROSS THE CROSS-CONTOUR OF HER FACE.





GAZ'S EYES VERY LOW ON FACE, ESPECIALLY WHEN HEAD IS TILTED DOWN LIKE THIS

A GENERAL NOTE: WITH THE LAYOUTS, PLEASE DO NOT MERELY CLEAN-UP A BLOWN UP STORYBOARD PANEL. RATHER, USE THE BLOWN-UP DRAWING AS A STARTING POINT TO RE-CONSTRUCT THE CHARACTERS UPON. REMEMBER THAT THE BOARD PANELS ARE SMALL, AND CHARACTERS' PROPORTIONS AND CONSTRUCTION CAN EASILY SLIP OFF-MODEL AT THAT SCALE. IF YOU ALWAYS RECONSTRUCT THE CHARACTERS, YOU CAN ENSURE THAT THE VARIOUS BOARD ARTISTS' PERSONAL STYLES WILL NOT LEAD YOUR LAYOUT ASTRAY.



I MUST EMPHASIZE: STRONGER CONSTRUCTION IS NEEDED, ESPECIALLY IN DYNAMIC ANGLES.

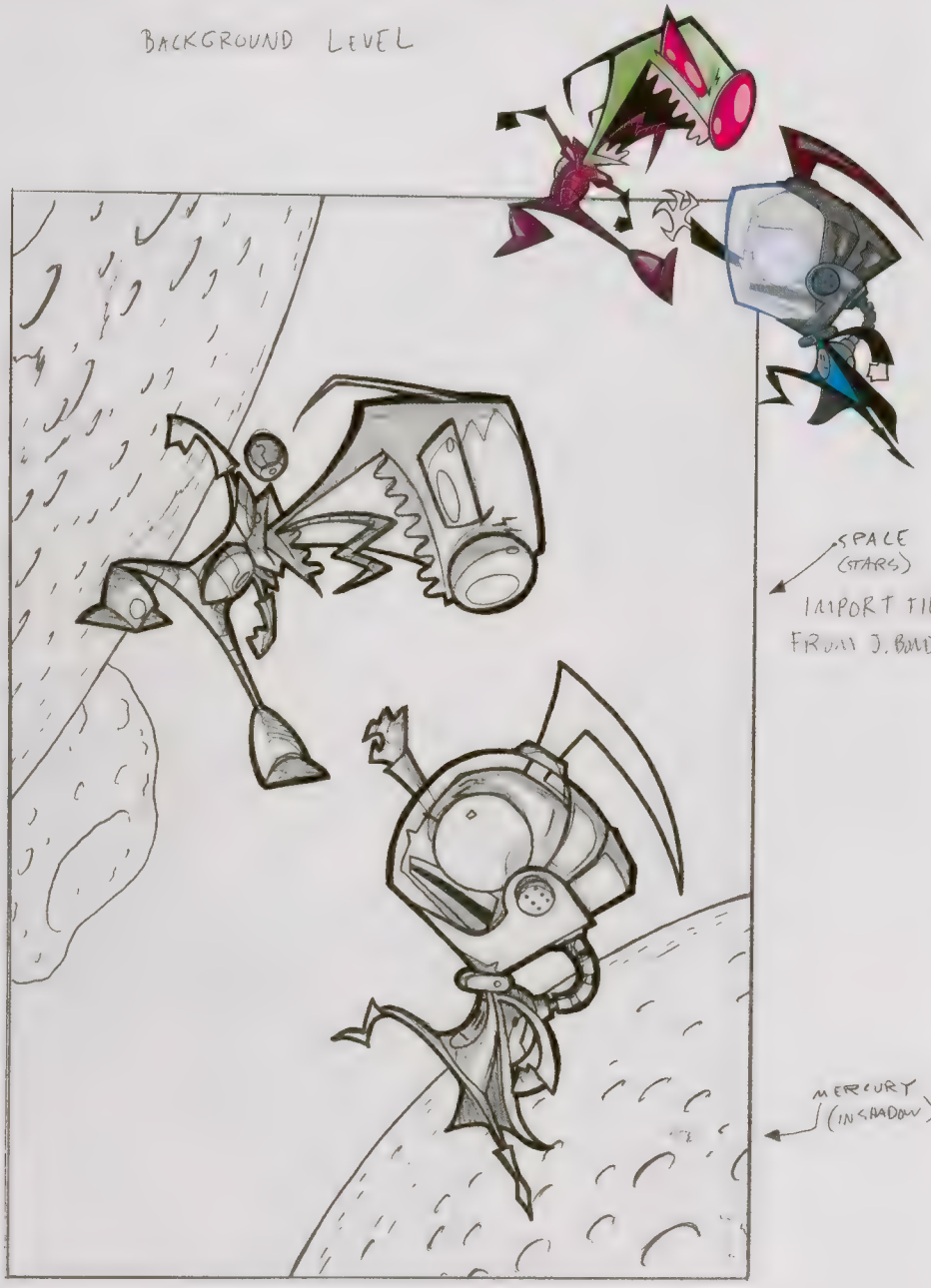
UNLESS IT IS FOR A SPECIFIC EXPRESSION, KEEP PUPILS PRETTY BIG

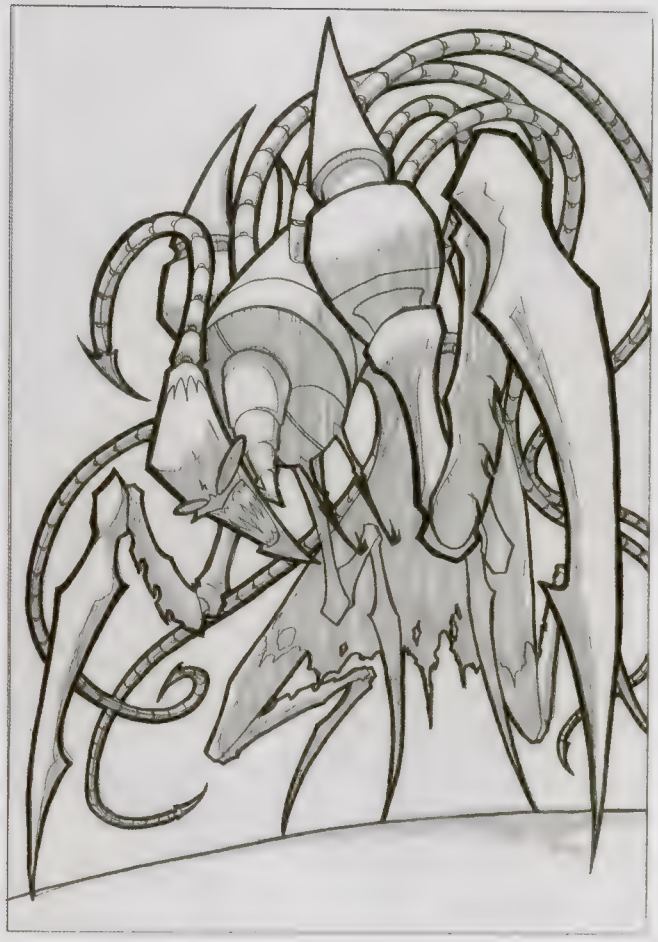
A SLENDER, TAPERED BODY SHAPES

This spread: Selections from the *Encyclopedia Zimtanica* continued.

113 AB "BATTLE OF THE PLANETS"

BACKGROUND LEVEL

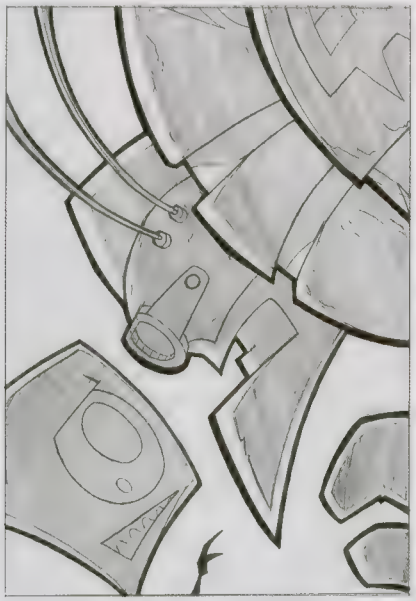




BK

116 AB "HALLOWEEN" NIGHTMARE BIRDS

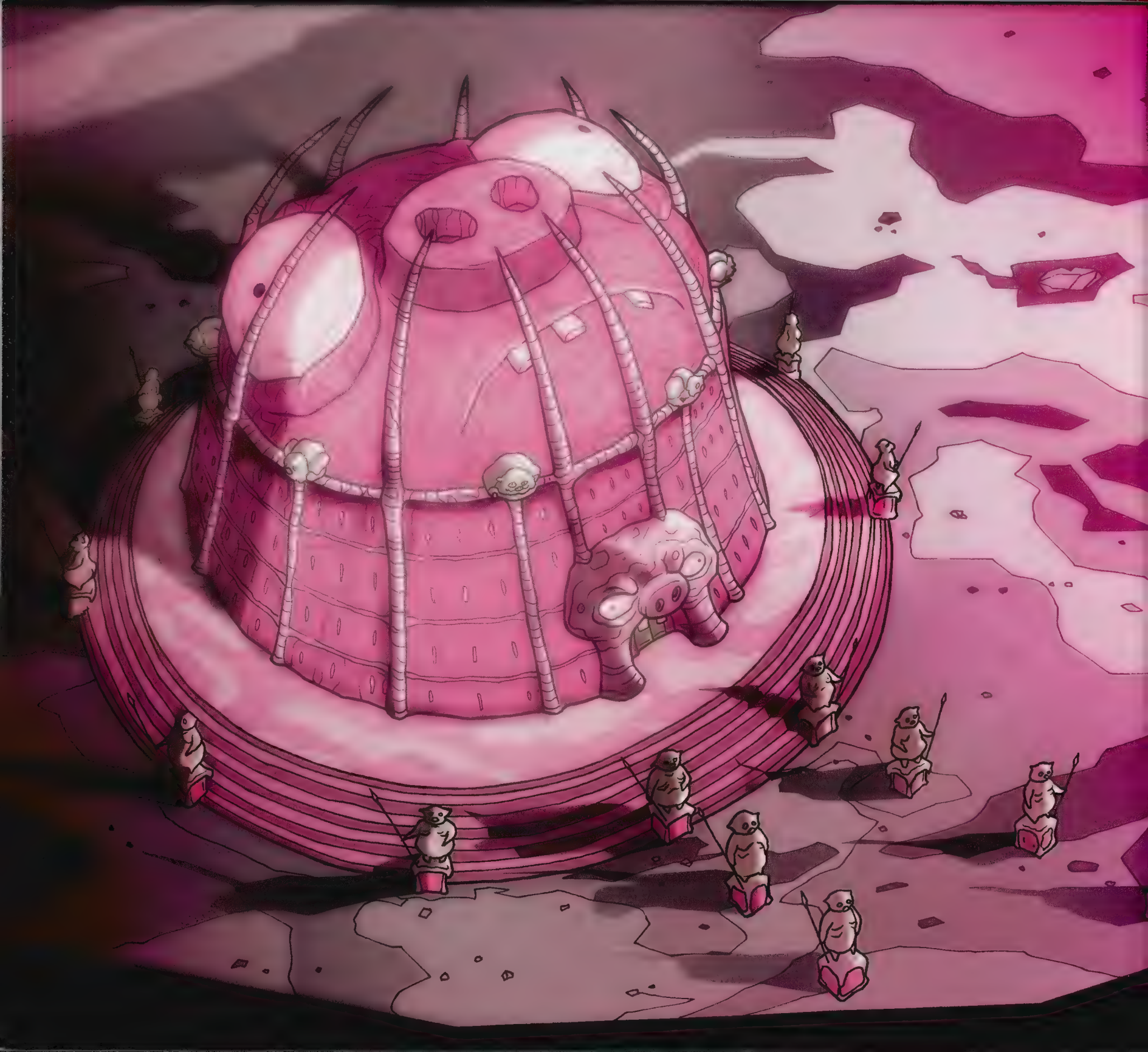
(BACKGROUND SHOULD STAY WHITE)

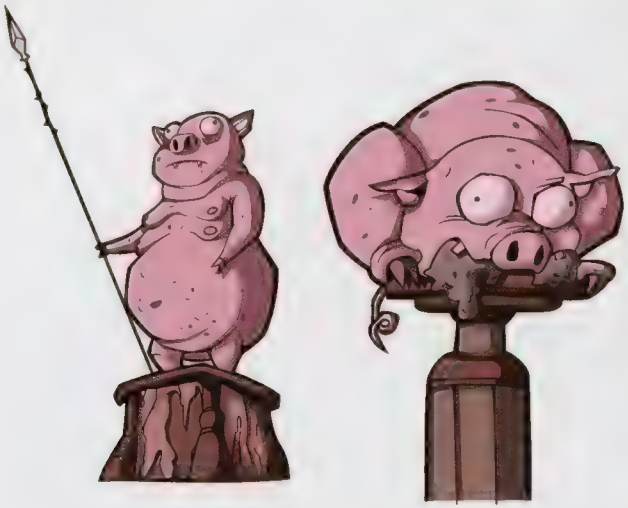


SKETCH #13:

120 AB "TAK: THE HIDEOUS NEW GIRL"

This spread: Promotional drawings for individual *Zim* episodes by Bryan Konietzko.





3: CONSTANT HORROR, UNENDING TERROR

WRITING AND DESIGNING THE STORIES OF ZIM

Some childhood experiences are especially formative, such as a special birthday party, a new puppy, or an alien spawn exploding out of actor John Hurt's chest cavity in a fountain of stage blood and butchered offal. Jhonen's love of horror and science fiction began at a tender age with his first viewing of Ridley Scott's *Alien*.

It wasn't just the experience of watching; Jhonen was aware of and fascinated by the fact that this was all manufactured, staged, acted. His fascination included an appreciation for the feeling of fear despite the awareness of the simulacrum of film. How was this made? How could these sounds and images elicit these primal reactions in viewers? How might he play in the same terrifying sandbox in the future?

Jhonen Vasquez [series creator]: The chest-burster scene scarred me, but I could not stop seeking out books or photographs of it or watching the movie over and over again knowing that this is fake—that that's fake blood, that these are actors—and how amazing it is that these real reactions, fear, and adrenaline rush could be created from fake things. I guess it says a lot about why *Zim* is the way it is, [*laughs*] because it's a kids' show—a kids' show for the kid that I used to be.

My favorite stuff when I was a kid was the stuff that stayed with me. The stuff that kind of bugged me, that kind of upset me, and then I had to think about it and absorb it. I loved *feeling* that. It was like being on a roller coaster. And I would have nightmares.

I loved things that messed with my little kid brain. Because I grew up with the typical Disney movies, when I saw any nontraditional animated stuff like the seventies Ralph Bakshi films—like his animated *The Lord of the Rings* and especially *Wizards*—or stuff in the eighties like *Lifeforce* or *Flight of the*

This spread: Dib and Gaz approach the impressive entrance to the realm of the Shadow Hog in "Gaz, Taster of Pork" (EP25).

Dragons, any weird stuff that wasn't Disney. . . . I couldn't understand what they were. They look like cartoons . . . but there's something . . . "wrong" with them, [*laughs*] there's something off. And I think that if anyone sees *Zim* and thinks that same thing, I'm like, "Cool!"

The Pop-Culture Soup

A generation of kids growing up in the 1980s had similar experiences to Jhonen, seeking out bizarre horror and low-budget movies on VHS tapes, late night UHF broadcasts, or on cable. An era of seventies and eighties films had been produced with increasingly visceral pre-digital effects to create convincing depictions of trolls, gremlins, zombies, aliens, alien clowns, werewolves, demonic leprechauns, and exploding heads, among other exciting things. Tapping into the zeitgeist, popular children's toys of the era, such as Garbage Pail Kids and Madballs, played with similar themes, like pus, protruding eyeballs, boogers, and festering scabs. Even Nickelodeon's signature slimings can be included in this grody to the max era of entertainment.

Plenty of young brains had been molded by this material, and grew up into adult fans, and even professional animation artists. Based on the dominant themes in Jhonen's comics work, the *Zim* production attracted a crew that shared a love of science fiction and horror media, and who were unusually in tune with each other's obsessions.

Jhonen: On the original crew we had a lot of guys who were huge horror fans. Chris Graham, especially–we had a shared love for silly, incredibly violent stuff. A lot of Sam Raimi.

Chris Graham [storyboard artist]: One thing I liked about the crew was that in general, we all knew about the same stuff. You could make a joke and everyone would know the references. I've never worked on another show where everybody on the crew was that close with what they liked. This was when all that niche pop-culture media was more difficult to access, so you really had to be into this stuff to know it.

Cinematic Shots

A script for every *Zim* episode provided a lot of information, but left much open-ended. Each storyboard artist had to draw the visual interpretation of that script, which meant that they must choose where to place the imaginary camera in relation to the action, like a cinematographer.

The cinematic shot choices in *Zim* were always reinforcing the references to horror and science fiction films that the crew loved. Extreme high- and low-angle

This spread: Roughly twenty-seven shots in about 1:45 running time of the episode "Vindicated!" (EP24A) took place in the school counselor Mr. Dwicky's office. It's a simple conversation between Dib and Mr. Dwicky, but practically every cut is a new dynamic camera angle. While it is series-appropriate to have many original shots, any more typical production would try to re-use at least a few of them more than once, since the audience wouldn't mind, and with so many strong compositions established, they probably wouldn't even notice while still producing a similar effect.

shots, distorted lens effects, and compositions with drawn objects overlapping the space—framing scenes with tubes, pipes, and machinery—were all elements that created a live-action horror and science-fiction film atmosphere.

Animated television productions typically try to limit these special touches to standout sequences and rely on simpler and more reusable shot designs for the rest of the episode, for efficiency. These choices were informed by the crew's enthusiasm for the films that they loved. There were, of course, consequences.

Louie del Carmen [storyboard supervisor]: There was a lot of swagger and exuberance in he shot choices, and the shot count in the show is insane. We did it because we could.

It was also a living hell. For example, inevitably, in every show there's a scene in Ms. Bitters's classroom. We must have ten thousand backgrounds of the same location. We'd be like, "Hey can we reuse this existing background?" and then, "Ah, it's almost there, but it's tilted enough that it's not working, so we can't use that as a direct layout." And then it was, "Okay, so we'll have to get someone to draw a new layout of that background from five degrees to the left."

And then there's Zim's lair. Zim's lair never looks the same way twice. Zim's lair is nebulous. He has unlimited resources to play with. Of course, that meant unlimited background layouts to sketch, pencil, ink, and paint.

Darkness

Because they were playing with this potentially volatile subject matter, sometimes Jhonen and crew were surprised not by what was rejected by the studio standards and practices department, but by what was allowed.

A particularly gruesome episode, "Dark Harvest" (EP4B), was a horror show. After being hit in the guts (his "squeedillyspooch") during a schoolyard game of dodgeball, then contracting head-pigeons (a pigeon landed on his head in class), Zim is sent to the school nurse by Ms. Bitters. Dib is delighted, telling Zim on his way out that the nurse will quickly realize that Zim is an alien because of his lack of human organs, and from there it wouldn't be long before Zim is flayed open on a top secret government autopsy table. Zim however, is confident. Before leaving class, Ms. Bitters assigns Zim a hall pass:

Ms. Bitters: No leaving the class without a hall pass, Zim. If you leave school grounds, it will explode.

Ms. Bitters fits Zim with a deadly exploding tracking-collar hall pass. As he roams the Skool, Zim begins the Dark Harvest.

(Continued on page 100)

In the language of film, it is normal and expected to cut back to established camera angles again and again throughout a sequence. Not on *Zim*!

Made with "swagger and exuberance" is an excellent way to describe the shot choices as Louie del Carmen does above.

CINEMATIC SHOTS

This spread: Various dynamic background art from the episodes "Gaz, Taster of Pork" (EP25), "The Frycook What Came from All That Space" (EP26), "Gir Goes Crazy and Stuff" (EP19A), and "Bestest Friend" (EP2A).

Zim: Say . . . you're full of organs, aren't you?
Hall monitor: Why yes, yes I am.
Zim: And you wouldn't notice if you were, say, missing a few?
Hall monitor: Probably not!
Zim: [*Maniacal laughter!*]

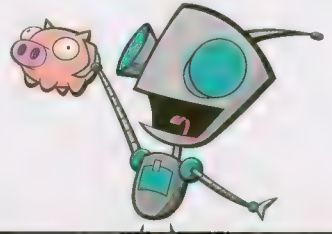
In an intentionally horrific, offscreen staging—built up with suspense and depicted only in shadowed silhouette—Zim harvests organs from the hall monitor with his backpack's robotic appendages. When the hall monitor stumbles back on-screen, the camera (in a broadcast cartoon first) zooms into his belly button, past an amassment of lint, and fully enters his abdomen through a long, textured, fleshy navel passage, not unlike a colonoscopy video, to reveal conspicuously missing organs.

In "Bad, Bad Rubber Piggy" (EP8B), Zim creates a hunter/destroyer robot to send to the past to destroy, once and for all, the primary threat to his mission: Dib. When that plan fails, Zim keeps sending rubber pigs to the past through a space-time object-replacement device, to degrade Dib's present. Because, of course, it's an inexact science, when objects are replaced in the past with rubber piggies, unusual, unforeseen side effects occur in the present, ranging from giant fish people in bear suits rampaging through Tokyo to the creation of the Bloaty's Pizza Hog restaurant chain.

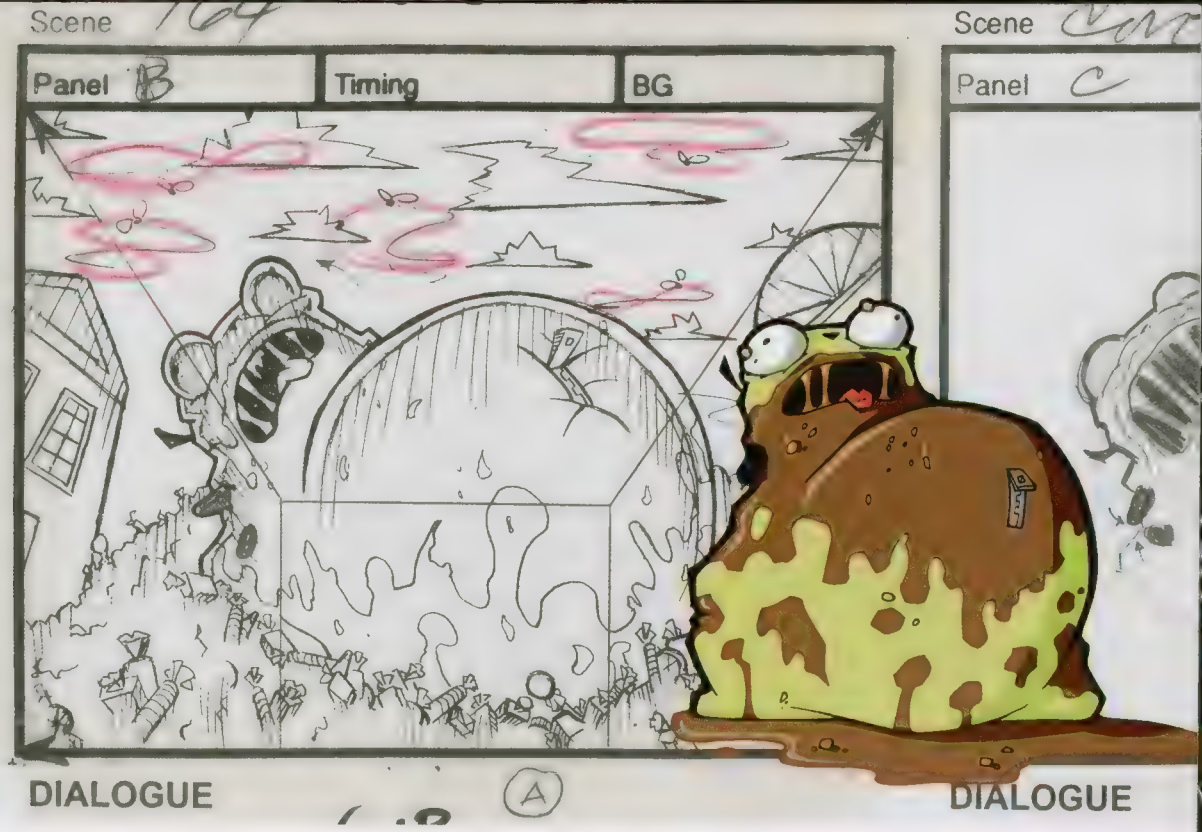
The darkness of this episode lies in the slow-motion, torturous murder Zim is inflicting upon Dib, despite the hilariousness of using rubber piggies to achieve it. Dib, after suffering multiple piggie-related traumas, now has purple skin welts, a lisp, missing teeth, a claw hand, and neck-tubes hooked up to a ventilator. After a final round of rubber-piggy object-replacement (rubber pigs replace the EMT's defibrillator nodes as he tries to revive Dib's tragically broken body), Zim succeeds in snuffing out Dib in the past.

But . . . Zim's plan is thwarted by unforeseen consequences. With the power of science, Professor Membrane revives his son by creating the Mega Boy 3000 (with fusion-powered titanium exoskeleton), possessing the strength of ten thousand little boys, and ready for revenge. And with that, you have the *Zim* version of a happy ending. Or something to that effect.

In some cases, storyboard artists anticipating a showdown with standards and practices over some particularly upsetting scenario would get ahead of the problem with creative staging of the action, as in the abovementioned organ harvesting. For example, in the second episode of *Zim*, "Bestest Friend" (EP2A), Zim extracts the eyeballs of a kid with robotic claws in order to replace them with cybernetic orbs.



Above: Scenes from the episode "Bad, Bad Rubber Piggy" (EP8B) in which Zim slowly, tortuously, kills his rival Dib only to have to face the consequences: a revived super-Dib bent on revenge created by Professor Membrane.



Jhonen: I don't think tearing Keef's eyes out was even an issue. [*laughs*]

Chris Graham: No. And that was my first "I can't believe I'm getting to do this" moment. The offscreen shadow staging of it came from my self-editing, thinking, "I can't show this, so I'm going to do it this way–which is actually cooler."

It was a classic directorial choice that filmmakers have used to build tension and suspense since the dawn of cinema.

Aural Nightmares

To back up these nightmarish visuals and really sell the suspense, the musical score had to be crafted with a sincere purpose. Kevin Manthei was the composer for the job.

Jhonen: The music in that eyeball scene doesn't even soften it. It's . . . horrifying! I remember sometimes Chris and the other board artists would come in and sit through some of the early music that Kevin would come in with, and I think a lot of the board artists would be thinking beforehand, "Okay, maybe I went too far," or "Maybe I didn't, I'm not really sure," but then when they came in to view the animatic with the music for the first time, there would be genuine moments of shock, like, "Ohh, ohh my God, this is maybe too much!"

Chris Graham: That was one of them! It was already intense–it was blood-red skies, cybernetic eyes–and then on top of it was this John Carpenter–esque music, and I loved it.

Jhonen: The way that that's lit, the way that that's scored, the way that that's boarded–it's how you would execute a scene of a very sincere horror movie! It was nightmare stuff. That's why it's so funny. Kevin was a huge part of that. Kevin's directive was, "Don't do cartoon music." And it was the way the board guys were boarding when it was horror or it was some kind of cool science fiction thing–they would do it the way the stuff was supposed to be handled, not for kids.

Sound Design

Sound is essential in creating an effective motion picture. In cartoons, there is a slate of cliché sound effects libraries that have been in circulation for decades that can be put together into a rote track, or on the nose parody, but a completely custom design for the soundscape is the ideal.

In any typical *Zim* scene, a careful listening to the background noises is in order, especially out among the

Above: "Halloween Spectacular of Spooky Doom" (EP14) was a one of multiple double-length episodes, meaning that it used both A and B sections of the episode's twenty-two minute running time as opposed to being two distinct eleven minute stories. Above, the cover page of the second section of storyboards (labeled 16B), and a choice panel of candy-bloated Gir, and the associated color model. The episode was written by Jhonen and Rob Hummel, storyboarded by Bryan Konietzko, and revised by Colin Heck, Warren Lee, and Tim Eldred.

citizens of Earth. At MacMeaty's, the ambient chatter includes slopping hogs and thick, viscous boiling. Screaming. Industrial machines. A constant *blorp squish smack* sound to create the sense of slithering gristle and oily flesh squelching down the throats of the germ-encrusted populace.

Jhonen: There would be a lot of car accidents, too. In a city street scene, in the background, you would just hear cars screeching and then you would hear screams.

In "Walk of Doom" (EP3B), Zim wears his new "insidiously clever" disguise, an old man costume. He and Gir are lost in the city. Their average, uneventful walk around the city is scored with a suspenseful thriller film–style track, and the background sound design has revolving screams, gunfire, and explosions mixed in to create the sense of constant surrounding carnage. The visuals are as benign as a small Chihuahua, a street performer, a cashier at a cash register, and a few people window shopping.

With growing fear and paranoia, Zim and Gir board a city bus. The bus's soundscape—coughing, gagging, pig noises, swarms of flies, gas releasing from balloons, and droning tones—build an agoraphobic, germophobic, claustrophobic nightmare.

Jhonen: Our sound guys were Salami Studios. They were told that when machines were moving, when things are transforming, when ships were looming, you're sound-designing a movie–these are real things, this isn't *The Jetsons*. This is serious, heavy sounds and lasers and energy. And these things are *dangerous*. They got into it, too. I loved it. I'd go in to preview their mix before adjusting anything, and they would get creative on their own and be like, "I don't know what you're going to think of this, but check this out!" And they would have a sound effect that was just . . . so horrifying. Or so funny. I loved that they were having fun and not just following orders.

One of the most upsetting things that I laugh at every time now, because I had forgotten how horrifying it is, is in the Christmas episode ["The Most Horrible X-Mas Ever" (EP27)]. Zim hooks up the guy dressed as Santa Claus to a machine to extract his Christmas imagery so he could learn what Christmas is, because Zim doesn't know. And it's this buildup, of *chugchugchug vwoooo*, and there's more and more, and there's drill sounds . . . and there's a shot of Zim looking at the calendar–a close-up on Zim–and you hear the guy in the background hooked up to this machine

and the sounds are these dentist drills and chain saws and he's like "*OOOOGH UUUGHGH!*"– he's wailing! The scene ends, and Zim is laughing because he's got a plan and the music is scary and building to this crescendo and you hear the guy in the background *screaming*, like this thing is killing him. It is not silly sounding. It is horrible. People hearing that would be like, "My God, this is terrible." But I'm like, "My God, this is terrible! But that's why it's funny!" I had forgotten it was that harsh.

Chris Graham: I don't think we were ever like, "Let's shock people." We were just doing things because we were into it. "I like David Cronenberg, so I want to do something like that." "Cool!" It was what we liked.

Social Angst

Zim explored more than one way to be a remarkably dark cartoon. Avoiding all of the sunny tropes of a kids-in-school cartoon that usually stars an ensemble of plucky classmates learning social lessons and being friends while solving mysteries, *Zim*'s primary players were tormented, socially isolated loners.

In "A Room with a Moose" (EP9A), Zim seethes while reviewing footage of his constant harassment at the hands of the other children in Skool. The Earth children are mocking and laughing at him, but only one is singled out in Zim's frame: Dib. A harrowing sequence builds as Zim stares with furious intensity at Dib, the focus of his ire.

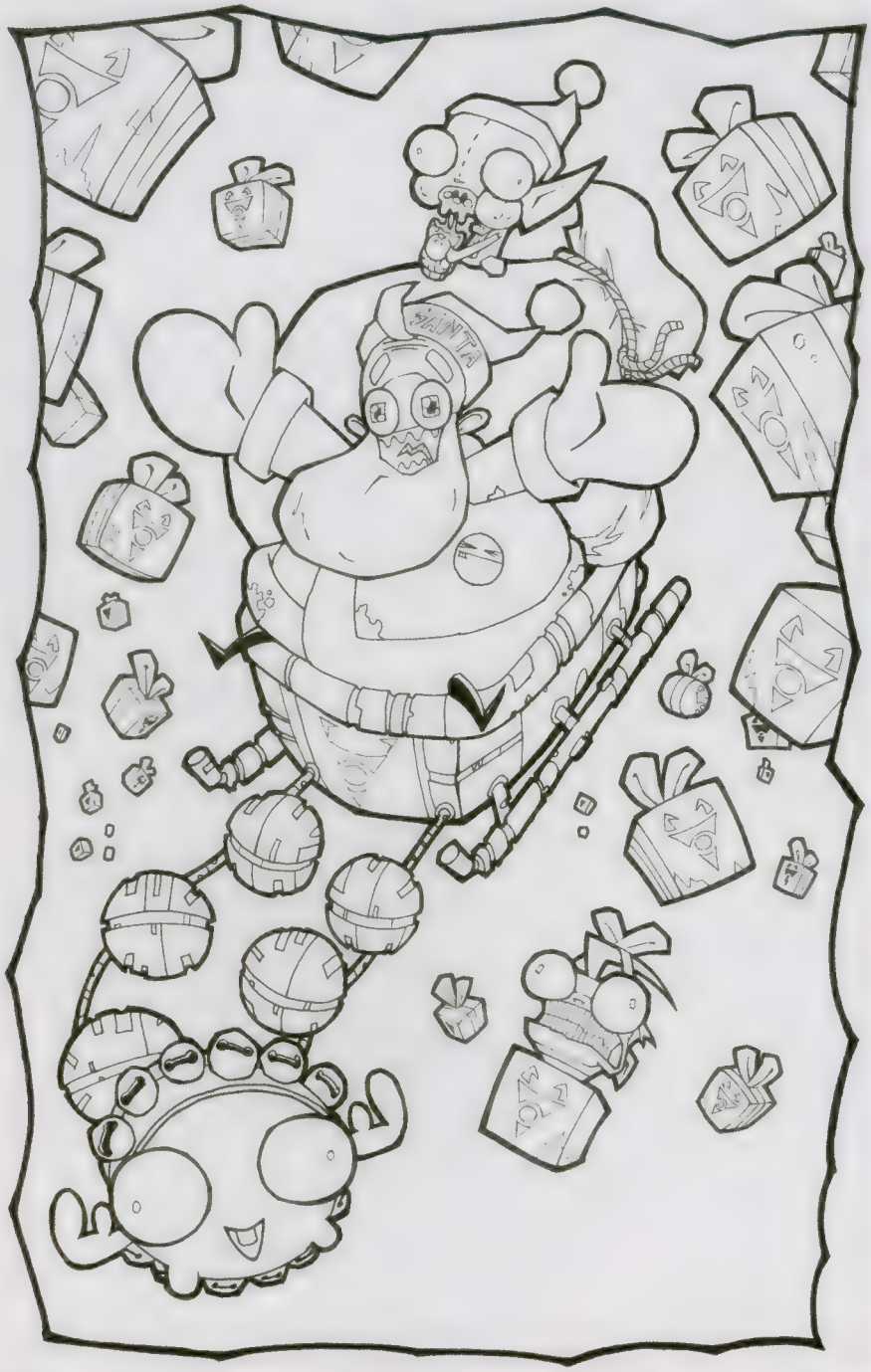
An undercurrent of *Zim* that neither Zim nor Dib ever acknowledge is that they reside, inexorably, somewhere at the bottom of the social hierarchy in Skool, even despite the colorful cast of children around them, with their own eccentricities and basic functionality issues. Zim and Dib each has his own single-minded obsession, and the nightmare of Skool, the other children, and teachers is just the backdrop that they stoically manage to exist in. It's their geeky hobbies (conquering the world, saving the world/paranormal research) that both set them apart and sustain their resistance to social pain. It is also one of the most relatable aspects of the series to kids with their own obsessions and social torment to manage. Zim and Dib's plight is very real.

Biology Lessons

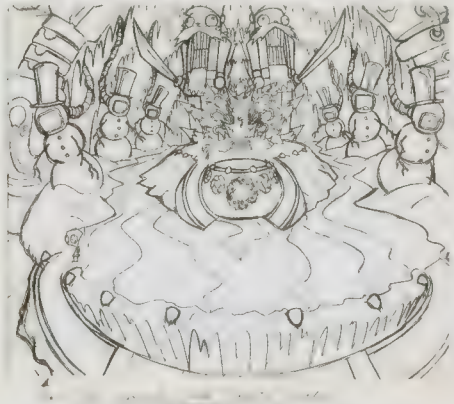
Compounding social problems, changes to the body throughout childhood and adolescence can be sources of even greater, and relatable stress. Human blemishes are magnified to comic extremes often in *Zim* as body

(Continued on page 106)

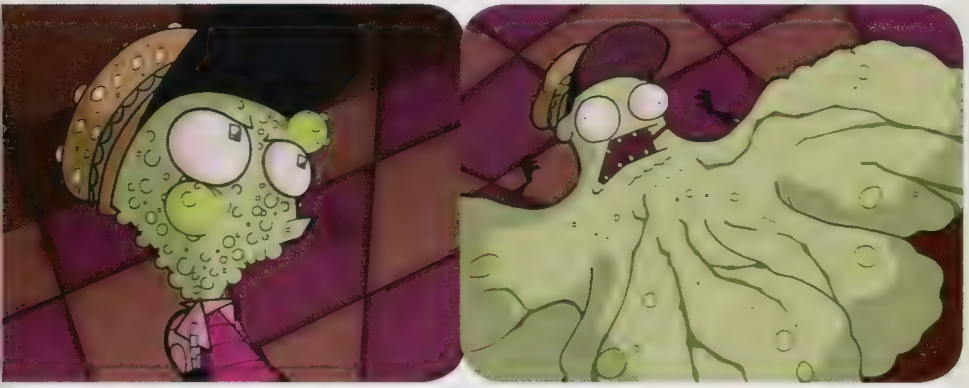
Above: A layout drawing by Spencer G. Davis, background pan, and a series of stills from "The Most Horrible X-Mas Ever" (EP27), in which the sound design is worth paying attention to closely in order to fully grasp the implied horror going on in the background of the scene.

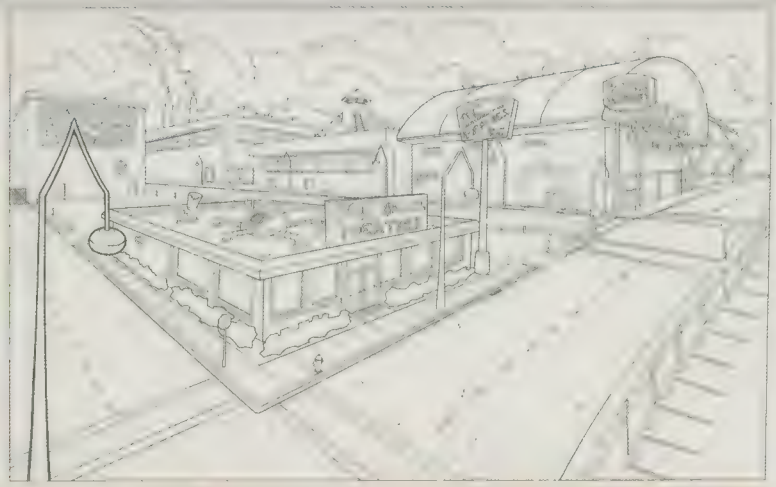


THE MOST HORRIBLE X-MAS EVER



This spread: Opposite page, far left, a promotional drawing from the episode "The Most Horrible X-Mas Ever" (EP27) illustrates Zim, Gir, and Mini Moose in jolly costumes with a distraught Dib. Additional art from the episode here includes finished backgrounds, layout drawings, and notes for design specifics of Zim's authoritarian-style Christmas takeover spectacle.





horror. In "Career Day" (EP6A) Zim is assigned work as a fry cook at MacMeaties. Unforeseen by Zim, the Galactic Equinox Alien Molt Phenomenon which causes all aliens living off their home planets to go through a hideous molt for a few seconds, begins its initial stages for him at work. Boils begin to form on Zim's skin. One of his neck pustules pops green gloop onto the french fries.

Recalling the climactic scene from Katsuhiro Otomo's film *Akira* (1998), Zim's hideous molt is an eruption of pulsing, veined flesh that fills MacMeaties like a viscous liquid, compressing patrons against the cracking glass and flowing out of drive-through windows and exhaust pipes. Even as Zim's bloated form retreats instantaneously and he stands fresh as a newly molted cicada, the biological process leaves a substantial quantity of green goo.

Zim, however, is only worried about his cover being blown.

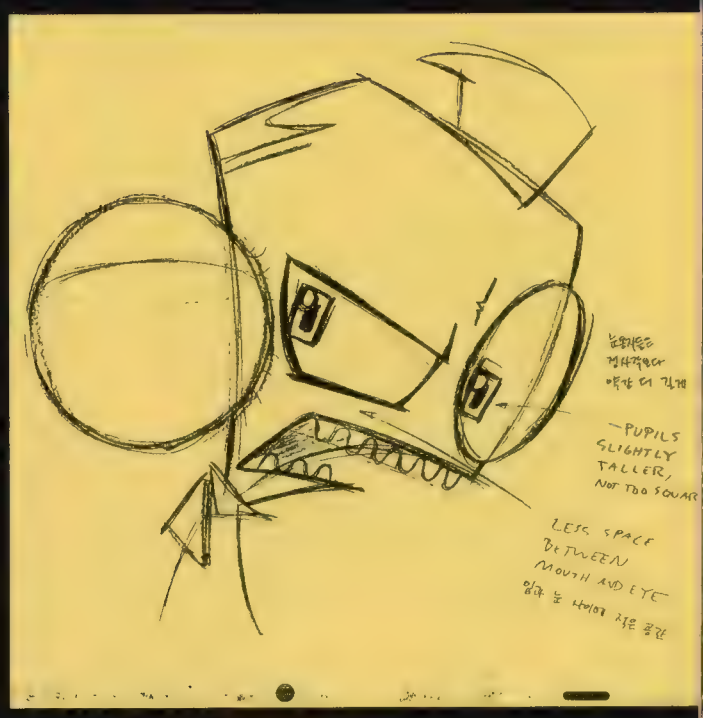
In a second episode involving eruptions of the dermis, "Rise of the Zitboy" (EP7B), Zim develops a gigantic semitransparent boil on the side of his head with swirling liquid visible inside, which turns out to be hypnotic. Zim is horrified by the deformity until he relaizes that he can use it to control the masses.

Jhonen: We wrote whatever heightened Zim's sense of Hitchcockian paranoia . . . anything that played with tension to a laughable extent. The show was supposed to be *so* serious that that is why it was funny. All of the characters have no clue that they're being silly–this is life or death stuff to them. It really is serious, too–Zim really is an alien invader, Dib really is trying to save the Earth–but in terms of the setting being an element, like the school, and no one else caring, the more tension we could throw in, the funnier. So if it was Zim having a pimple, nobody cared–they just thought it was gross or whatever–but to Zim, when he first finds out about this giant zit growing on his head, it's terrifying. I don't remember how it turned out that it had hypnotic powers, though. [*laughs*]

Episodic Action

One way that the *Zim* series stands out today is that it was created in a past era when most American-produced cartoon series episodes were self-contained stories, without multi-episode or season-wide continuity arcs. For example, there was no fallout in a subsequent episode from Zim's giant hypnotic zit eruption that destroyed the classroom with a geyser of pus. Behind the closing credits the whole world would reset, ready for a fresh adventure.

Above: In the episode "Career Day" (EP6A) Zim suffers the grotesque Galactic Equinox Alien Molt Phenomenon at an inopportune moment while working at a fast food restaurant for Skool's career day.



Chris Graham: That's what I loved about that show—each episode would be totally different. There would be Zim with a giant hypnotic zit, then the next episode was about a robot or mech suit, and then there would be "Bolognius Maximus" [EP12A], where Zim and Dib turn into sausages.

Jhonen: The show was kind of a repository for all the crew's current obsessions. "Bolognius Maximus" just outright was the scene from *The Fly*. [*laughs*]

Chris Graham: A lot of people hated that ending. I've had people ask me, "It just ended? They're just sausages now? That's how it ends, unresolved?!"

Jhonen: The climate today . . . seems hostile to one-offs. The general audience does not want a self-contained story, they want a continuing narrative. *Zim* wasn't that weird for the time. Episodes were generally episodic, but *Zim*'s would end much more starkly. They would be dead, or they would be hotdog people. And then, in the next episode, it wasn't about how they got out of the previous episode's predicament, it was just a whole other thing. And now, I don't think people would like that.

For example, in the *Zim* comics, we get comments in response to a story ending like that. We had one where a giant donkey kicked the Earth into the sun, and they fly into the sun and the comic ends on the playground where Dib is saying, "Hey, remember when that donkey kicked us into the sun?" and Zim says, "Nope!" and that's the end. And you'd think that people would be like, "Haha, okay, that's just really stupid," but there's people that get genuinely angry! Like, "Oh my God, I can't believe they're still doing this kind of thing like from the series," and it's like, "Of course we do it from the series, *that was the series*!"

Backhanded Social Commentary

This silliness was pervasive throughout the series, for many purposes. For one, Jhonen and crew chose to amplify things that they observed from reality to ridiculous extremes to comment on the stupidity and dullness of a hyper-consumer culture and society. Everything was awful. Everything was absurd. Everything was wasteful. Skool, and everything about it, was a perfect encapsulation of this. But, could they really be talking about *us*? No, it couldn't possibly be us. . . .

(Continued on page 110)

Above: Stills and an animation guide note from "Rise of the Zitboy" (EP7B), in which pizza grease from Gir's slice causes Zim to develop a pustule, which when decorated with a face becomes imbued with hypnotic powers. Zim exploits those powers until the zit erupts in class.

S008 BOLOGNA DIB STAGE 1 W/BITE.

S0174 BOLOGNA DIB STAGE 2.

S001 BOLOGNA DIB FINAL STAGE.

S005 DIB'S SKELETON.

S039 DIB TURNING INSIDE OUT.

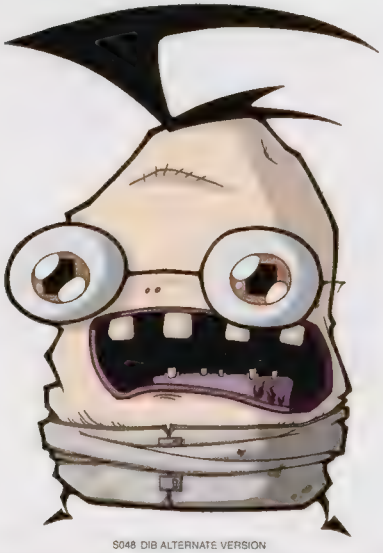
S003 ZIM W/ BOLOGNA RASH.

S0172 BOLOGNA ZIM STAGE #1.

S0173 BOLOGNA ZIM STAGE #2.

S009 BOLOGNA ZIM FINAL STAGE.

S038 DIB INSIDE OUT



S048 DIB ALTERNATE VERSION

S008 DIB PULLED INTO SPELLDRIVE

SQUISHED

NOT SO SQUISHED

S001 PUFFY ZIM

BODY HORROR

This spread: Cartoon animation is the perfect medium for depicting grotesque mutations of form. The *Zim* crew frequently submitted their cute and iconic characters to horrible transformations that invoked both laughter and revulsion. These special pose models include bologna transformation stages from "Bolognius Maximus" (EP12A), and Dib being sucked into

the portal in his own forehead from "Halloween Spectacular of Spooky Doom" (EP14), among others. The layout drawings above depict distinct zones inside of Dib's body from "NanoZim" (EP2B). Above right, Zim gags out a spool of children's internal organs before slurping them back inside from the episode "Dark Harvest" (EP4B). Below that, in a couple of stills from the episode "Bloaty's Pizza Hog" (EP10B) Gaz fantasizes about whether or not letting Zim vivesect her brother Dib to see what he "would look like with his organs on the outside" would prevent them from a family night eating out at a restaurant. (It would.)

Jhonen: We never got really structured with what the Earth even was, if that was even America where Zim landed . . . sometimes it was more representative of actual places, but we never said that they lived in America. The maps were always a little weird. We had a globe in the school, and we made sure to have the continents not be recognizable.

I wish we had gotten further along with that sort of stuff. There wasn't the American president–it was President Man from President Land. In the comics, Earth is spelled "Urth"–it's some other place.

The hyper-exaggerated absurdity of *Zim*'s Earth could be interpreted as a satirical look at the uglier side of our reality. After all, Jhonen had conceived the series by thinking about "how stupid everything is."

The Chaos Factor

That's so random! In the early 2000s, so-called "random" humor had become the lingua franca among the young and Internet savvy. This was the post-dancingbaby.gif, pre-smartphone, pre-meme, pre–YouTube era, when much of the Internet's user discourse took place on fragmented discussion boards organized around specific subjects. *Zim*'s debut placed it at the heart of this era, and its absurdist elements and particularly the strange dialog of Gir, the malfunctioning robot, are often cited as part of the mass-culture media that helped to feed this trend.

Jhonen: *Zim* got this reputation of sort of being a progenitor of random humor, but whenever people say that, I don't think their arguments are well thought out. There was a reason why every stupid joke was in there. Even if the point was that there was no point. But to have anything be random in a television series? There's so much that goes behind this stuff, there's so much time that goes into it, that trust me, it's there for a reason. And usually, it's that someone thought it was funny. Or they were like, "I don't know if this is funny, but let's see if this works." In a situation where the choice was to have something that doesn't make sense in a scene or not to have anything there at all, I was always like, "At least let's make this memorable." And often times what is memorable is something that has no logic behind it. That's why anything worked on the show! Because we tried it! Not knowing! Failing a lot of times.

Twenty-five percent of the time it was probably us just addressing network notes and just doing it very snarkily, and then those fixes would be approved, and we were like, "Oh, we never thought

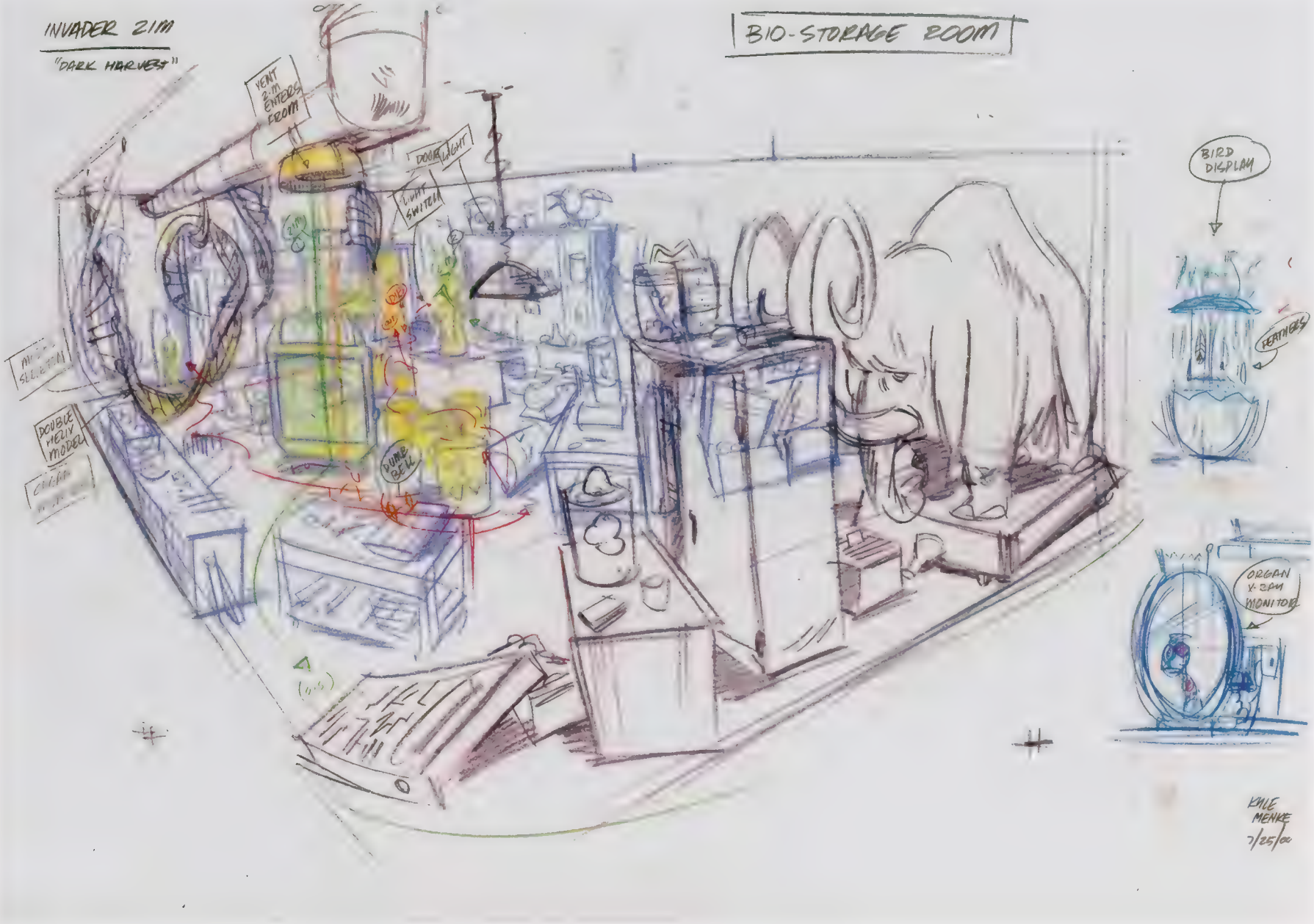
those would actually get in!" So we'd just leave them in and say, "Let's see what happens." Things like Iggins flying out of the elevator after a crash in "Game Slave 2" [EP12B] has happened because he couldn't be dead–in the original version, we'd just had him plummet in an elevator and crash, and we had ended it there. And the notes were that we couldn't just kill him off–that wouldn't be nice–so we solved that by saying, "Okay, he's not dead. In fact, he's so healthy that now he can fly!" And that was a sequence of events that resulted in that stupid thing happening. We could have come up with any number of more logical events, but we just thought that that would be the funnier way to go about it.

Gir gets a lot of flack for being a random character, but I can't imagine that people who say stuff like that actually know the show. Gir is a broken machine! None of it is random, it is the result of him being malfunctional. He doesn't work! He's made of garbage. It's amazing that he functions at all. Good for him! He's getting by. Nothing that any of the board artists came up with for Gir ever felt random. He might be annoying, and he might not be funny, depending on who you are, but it's not random if the whole point of the character is that nothing he does makes any sense.

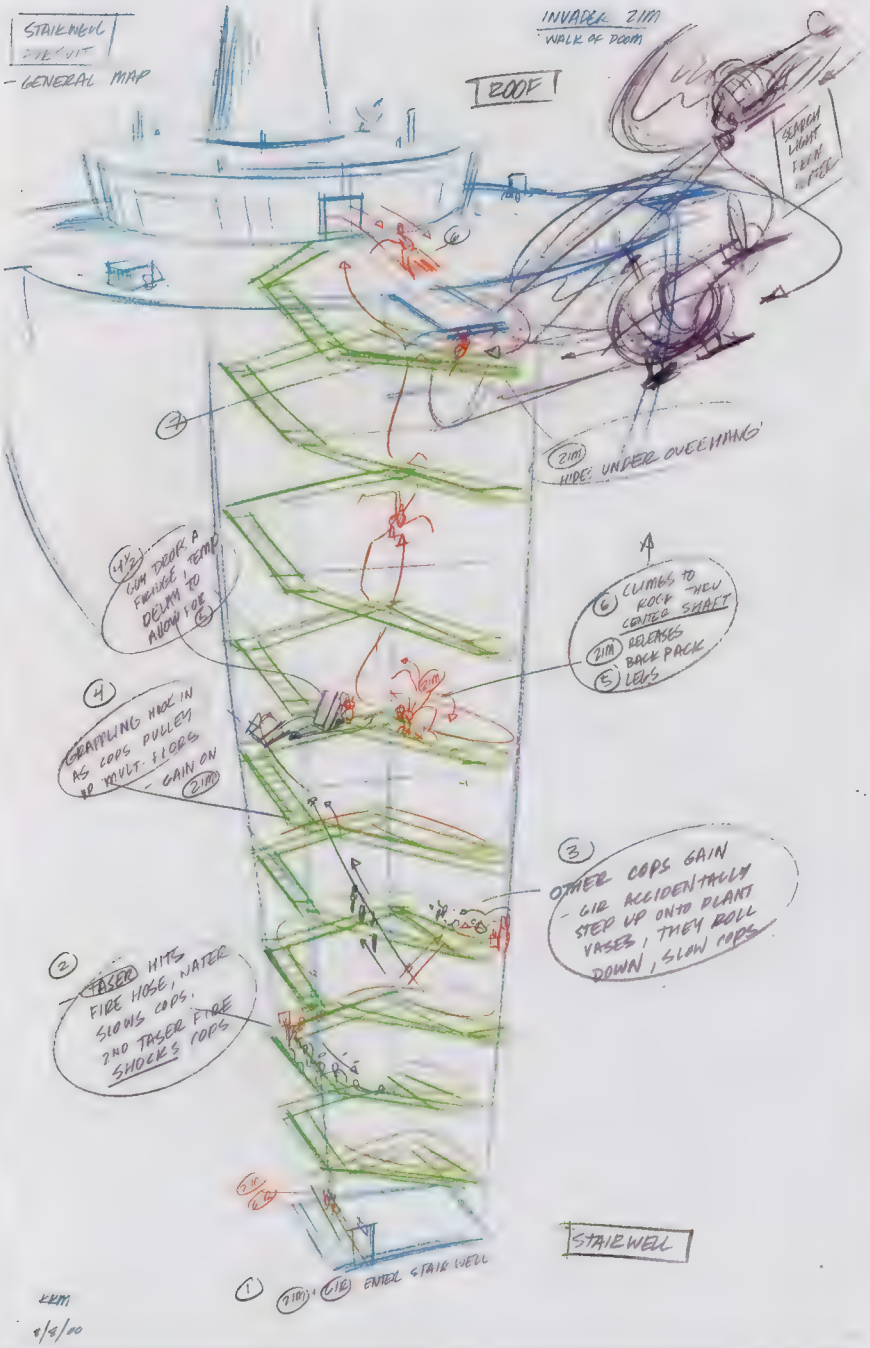
Zim saying something that doesn't make any sense is the result of him not understanding human civilization or language or culture; he just doesn't get it. He just doesn't understand the people.

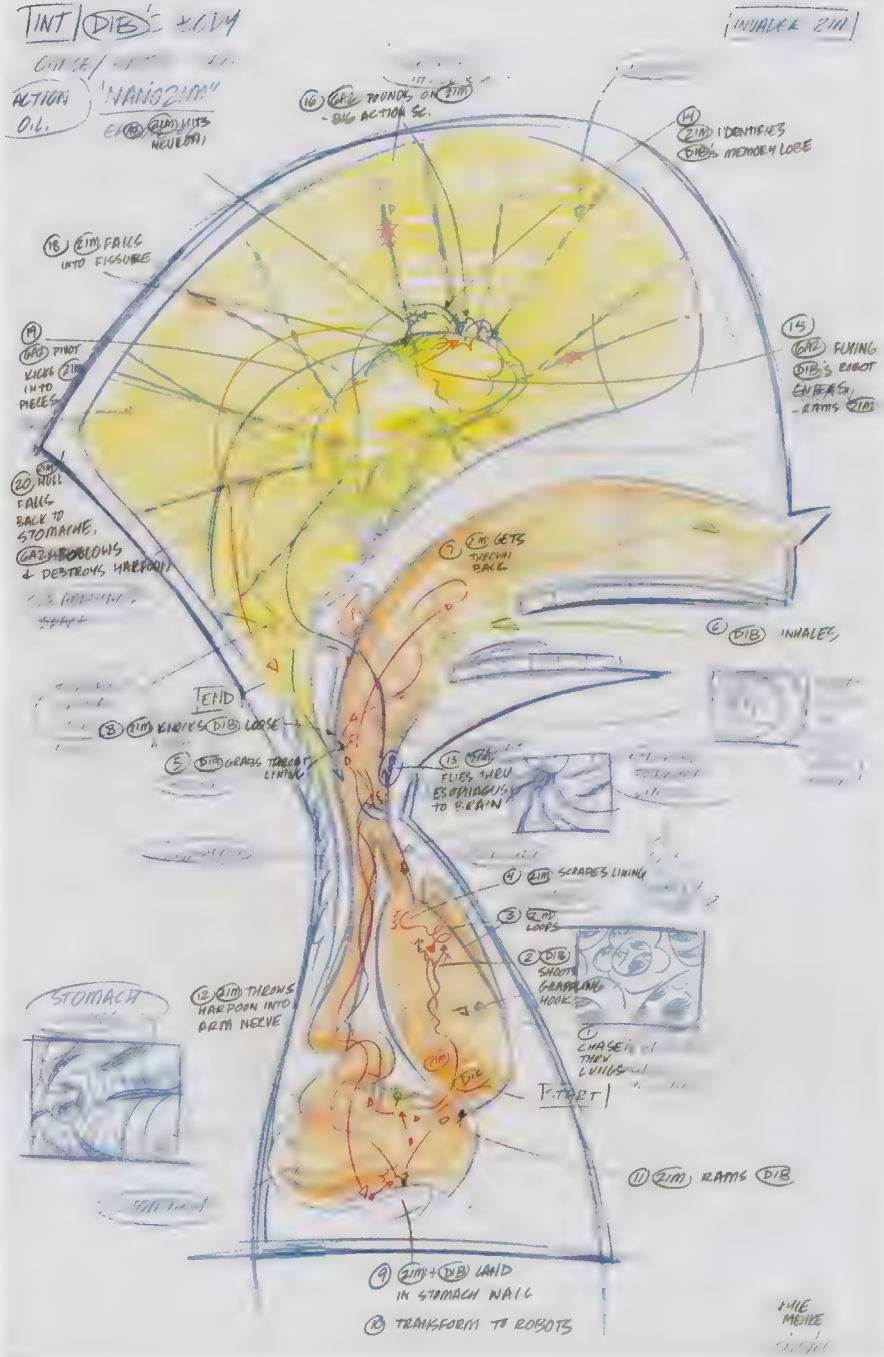
Dib doesn't say random stuff. He isn't a random character–there is always a purpose. Gaz doesn't say random stuff. Two of the main characters are either people who are broken, or don't understand why what they're saying makes no sense. There's nothing random about that, so when we write them, we write them in their characters, which happen to come off as bizarre.

This spread: In the episode "The Sad, Sad Tale of Chickenfoot" (EP18B), the filthy nightmare world that Dib inhabits gets fleshed out some more as we visit new locations such as the Chicky Licky restaurant chain, the hospital, and the Sweaty Pits apartments. How much this all is based on modern life in the United States is left to the eye of the beholder.


INVADER ZIM
"DARK HARVEST"
BIO-STORAGE ROOM
VENT 2-M ENTERS ROOM
DOOR LIGHT
LIGHT SWITCH
DUMB BELL
DOUBLE HELIX MODEL
BIRD DISPLAY
FEATHERS
ORGAN X-RAY MONITOR
KYLE MENKE 7/25/00

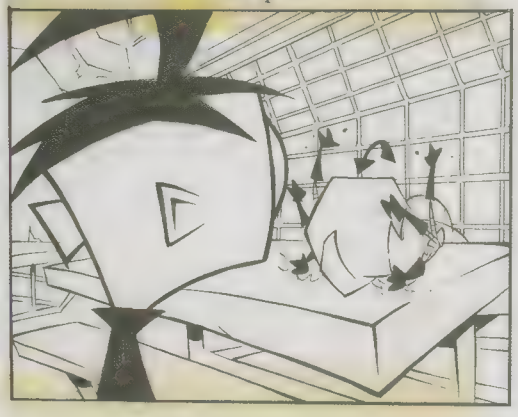
ACTION MAPS

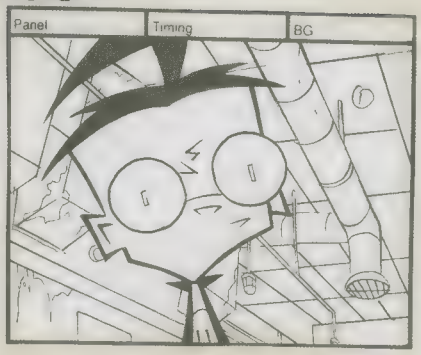


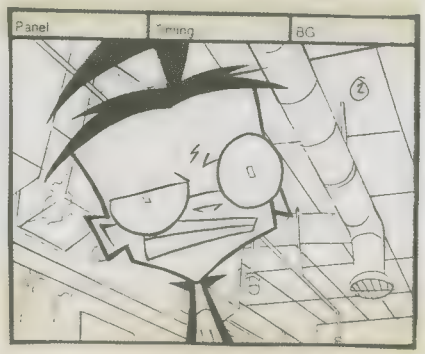


This spread: Kyle Menke created these action maps for the episodes "Dark Harvest" (EP4B), "Walk of Doom" (EP3B), and "NanoZim" (EP2B).

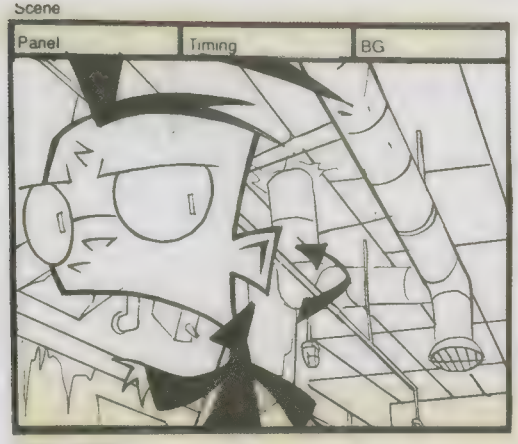
Kyle Menke [storyboard artist]: "I drew these before I would storyboard an action sequence. They helped me to plot out the beats and understand the environment as well as figure out the best camera angles. I would also show these to Steve [Ressel] and Jhonen before I did my thumbnails to see if they had any additional ideas or gags."



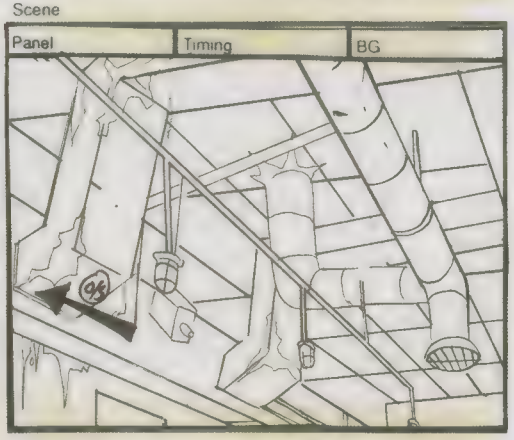




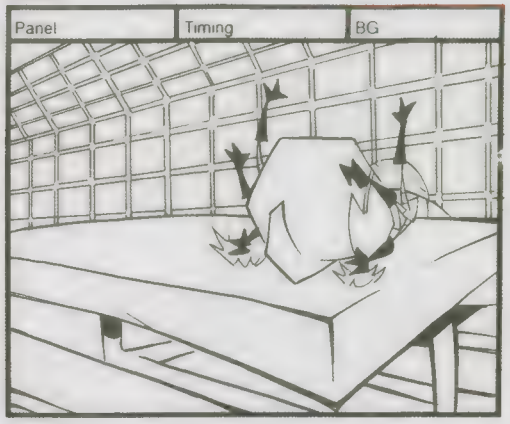
C0350 POONCHY,
DRINKER OF HATE.
COLOR REVISED FOR SEASON 2.
new color model



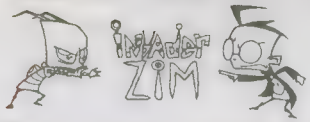
DIALOGUE



DIALOGUE



DIALOGUE



PAGE _____

Scene
Panel | Timing | BG

DIALOGUE

THEN SUDDENLY STOPS

Scene
Panel | Timing | BG

STOP

START

THEN LOOKS UP
DIB IS GONE

PAN UP WITH ACTION

Scene
Panel | Timing | BG

DIALOGUE

STOP

START

ZIM LEAPS UP OFF OF SEAT ...

Scene
Panel | Timing | BG

DIALOGUE

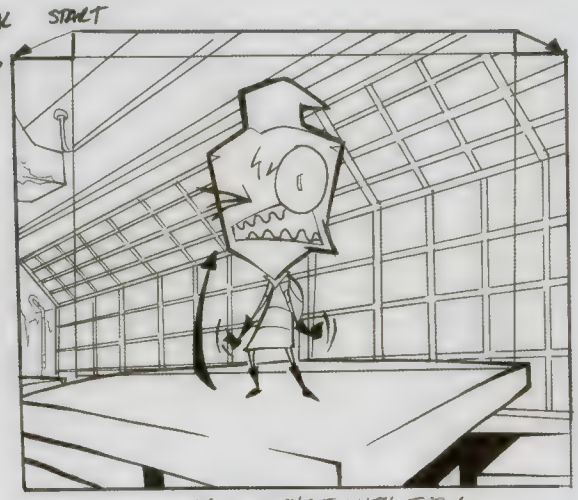
AND LANDS ON TABLE TOP.

Scene
Panel | Timing | BG

CONT
NEXT
PAGE

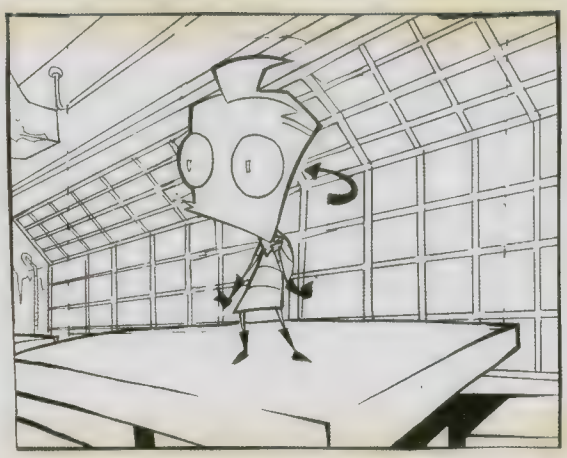
DIALOGUE

This spread: Storyboards are drawn to illustrate every significant visual action and scenario of an animated production before animation begins. "Invader Poonchy" was an unfinished *Zim* cartoon that had barely begun production when the series was canceled by the network. Along with "Nubs of Doom," another unfinished eleven-minute short, the combined two stories would have been the twenty-eighth episode of the series. Above are some of the existing storyboards for the unfinished "Invader Poonchy" and a color model for Poonchy.

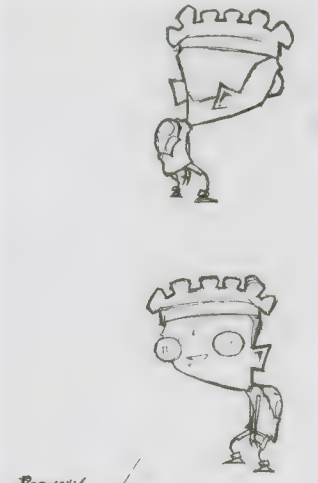


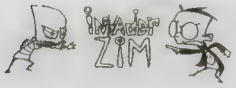
ZIM RISES UP, HIS FIST SHAKE WITH FURY

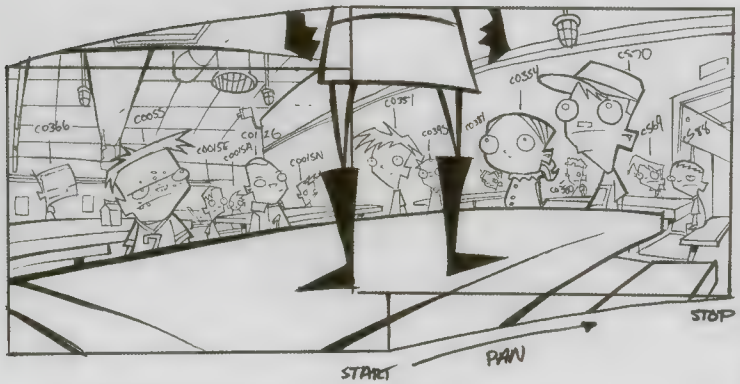
DIALOGUE: CURSE YOU DIB. YOUR TOO CLEVER...



ZIM TURNS AND LOOKS O/S

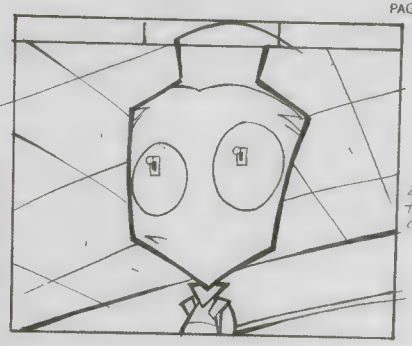




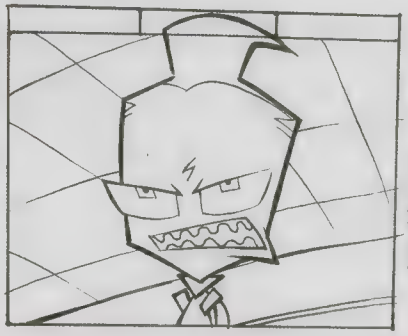


TO SEE A CAFETERIA FULL OF CLASSMATES LOOK AT HIM

PAGE

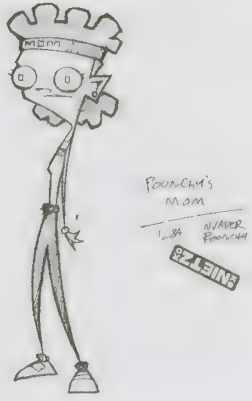


ZIM TRYS TO REGAIN COMPOSER



THEN BEGINS TO LOSE IT

DIALOGUE: FINE, DIB, LOOKS LIKE IT'S TIME FOR MORE DRASTIC MEASURES..



Scene | Panel | Timing | BG

DIALOGUE

POONCHY WALKS DOWN THE SIDEWALK TOWARDS HIS HOME

Scene | Panel | Timing | BG

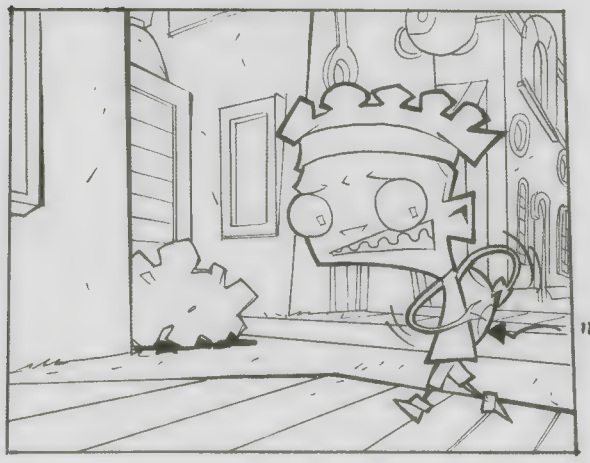
POONCHY TURNS AND WALKS DOWN PATH TOWARDS FRONT DOOR

PAN (A) → (B) THEN BACK TO A AS IF ZIM THINKS HE MIGHT BE SEEN FROM HIS HIDDING PLACE

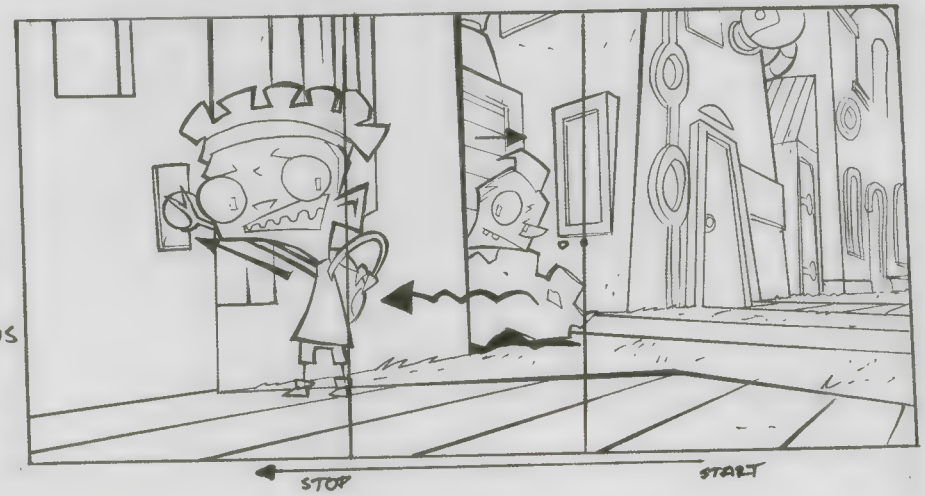
Scene | Panel | Timing | BG

CONT NEXT PAGE

DIALOGUE

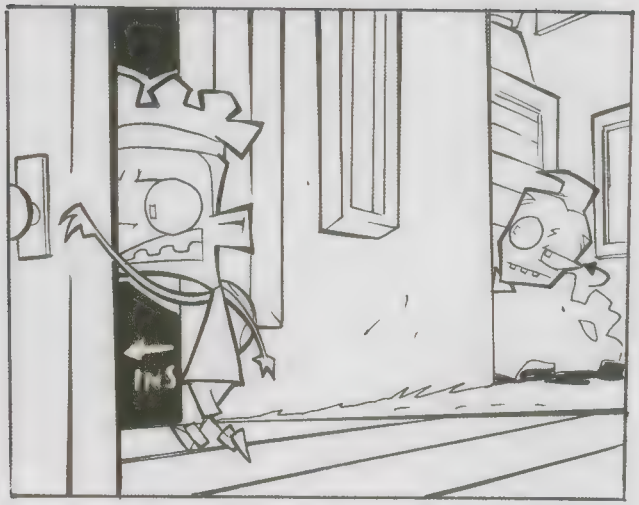


POONCH WALKS INTO SCENE RUBBING HIS NEW BACK PACK

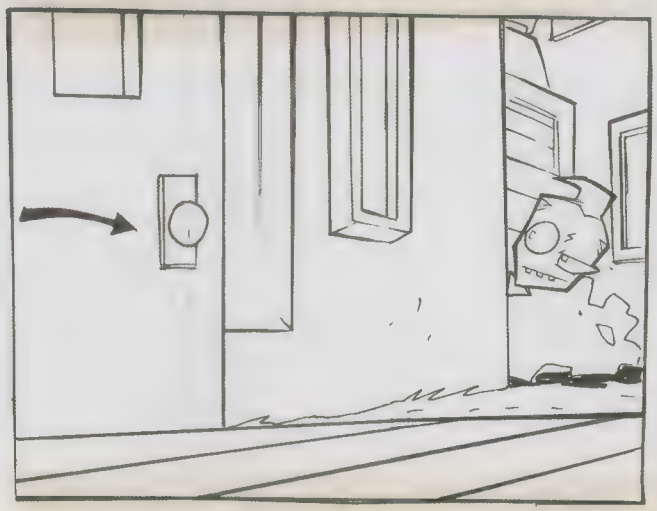


AS POONCHY HEADS TO FRONT DOOR CAMERA PANS WITH ACTION. WHEN POONCHY PASSES BUSH [illegible] ZIM POKES HIS HEAD OUT FROM AROUND THE CORNER

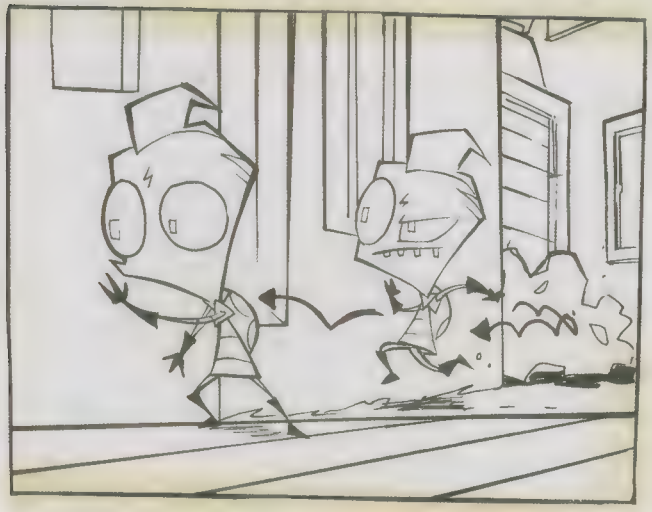
This spread: "Invader Poonchy" storyboards continued, along with designs for Poonchy and Poonchy's mom.



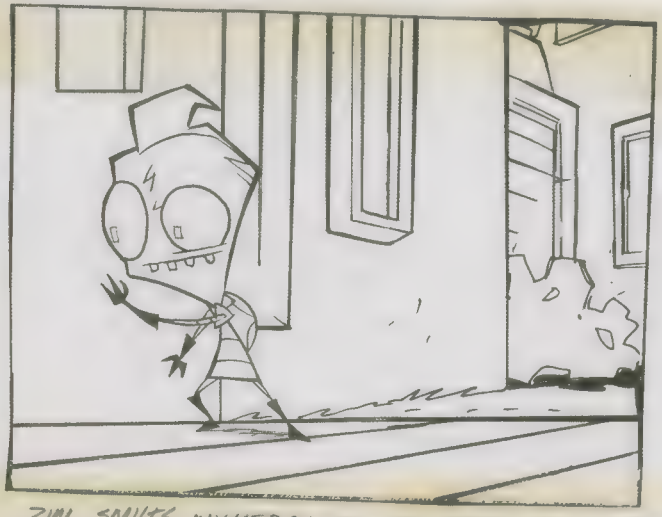
POONCHY OPENS DOOR & WALKS INSIDE
ZIMS HEAD TURNS TO FOLLOW POONCHY.



POONCHY SHUTS DOOR BEHIND HIM.

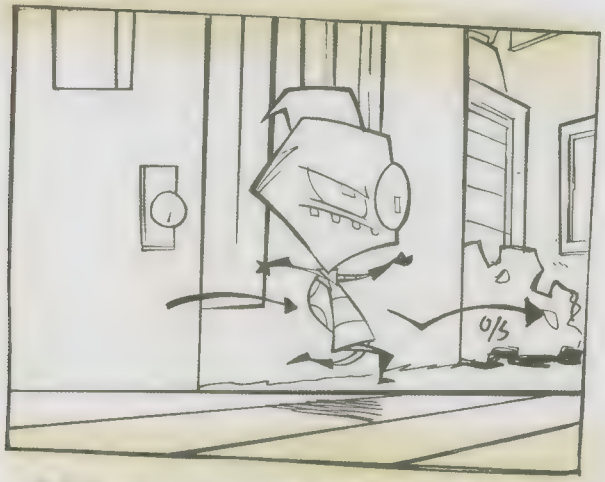


ONCE POONCHY HAS ENTERED HOUSE ZIM RACES AROUND CORNER AND PRESSES HIS EAR TO THE DOOR.

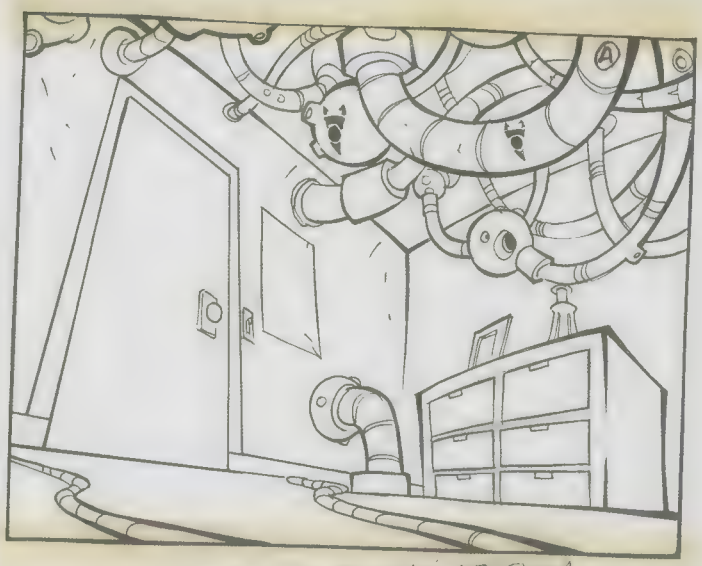


ZIM SMILES WICKEDLY AS HE HEARS POONCHY SPEAK DIALOGUE:

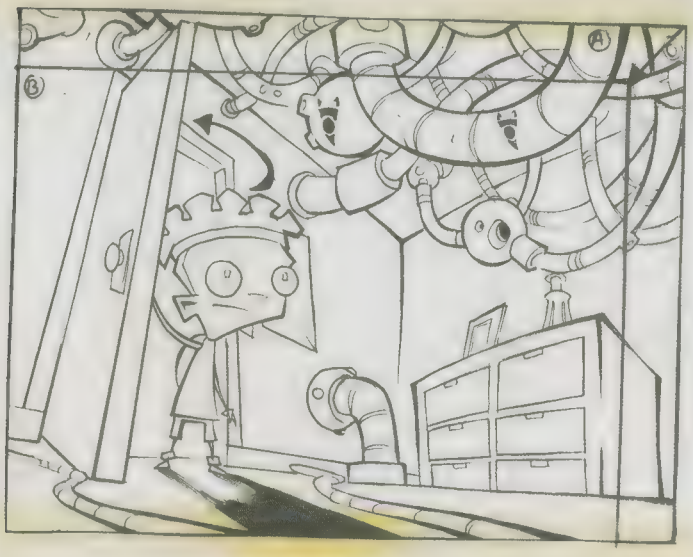
MOM, SKOOL WAS CRAZY. IM GONNA GO TO MY ROOM AND WIND DOWN WITH SOME VIDEO GAMES YA KNOW? YAHHH, YOU KNOW. YEAH!



ZIM TURNS AND RUNS 0/5 METER



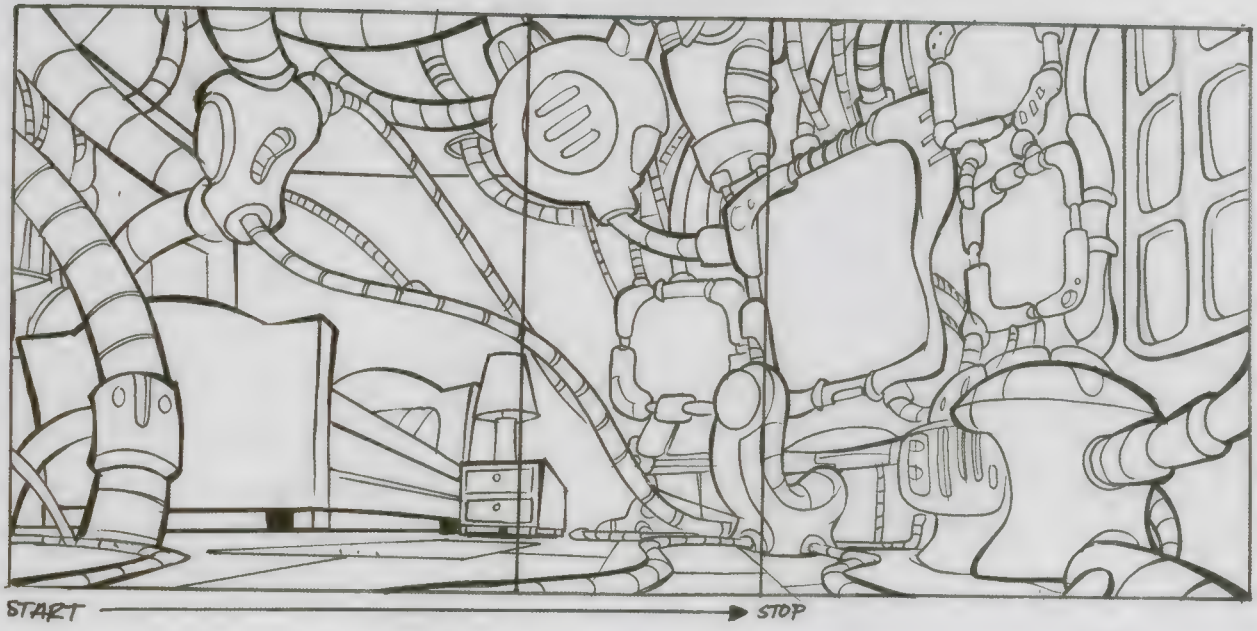
INTERIOR OF POONCHY'S BED ROOM



TRUCK IN A → B

CONTINUE
NEXT PAGE →

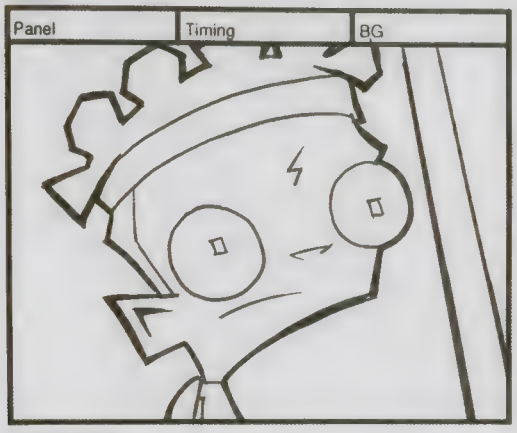
NEWSCASTER
128A Poonchy



POONCHYS P.O.V. AS HE LOOKS LEFT TO RIGHT CAMERA PANS

NOTE: GRAND E-X ON ALL COMPUTER SCREENS IN POONCHY'S ROOM.

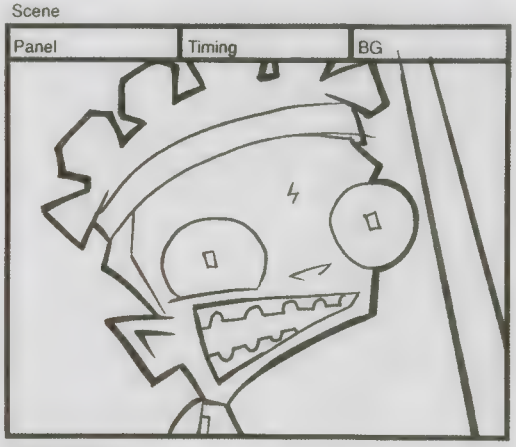
Scene | Panel | Timing | BG



DIALOGUE

POONCHY STARES BLANKLY,

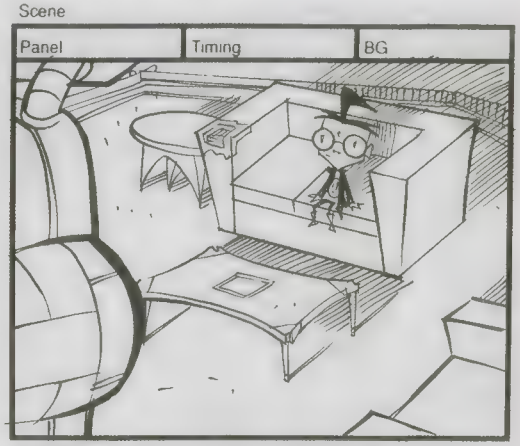
Scene | Panel | Timing | BG



DIALOGUE

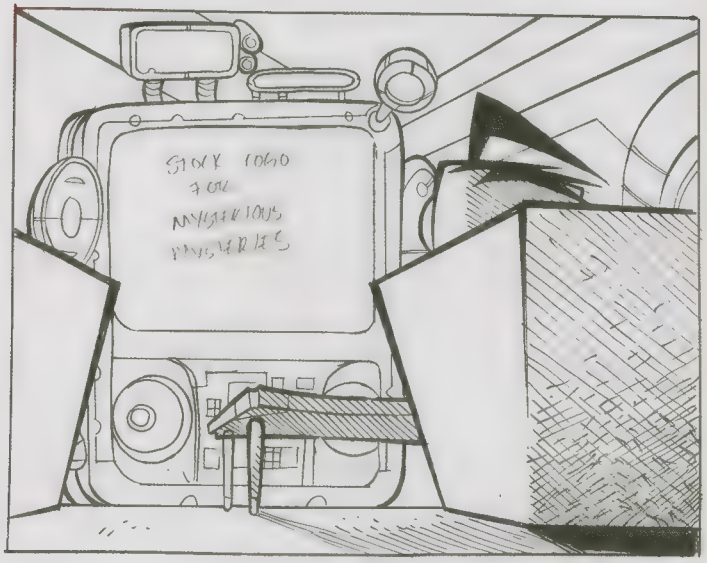
THEN SMILES → COOOOOL.

Scene | Panel | Timing | BG

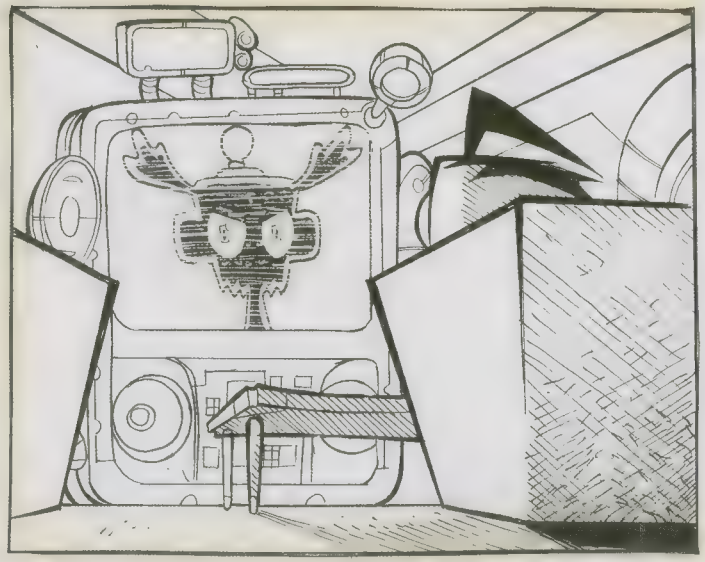


DIALOGUE

DIB SITS IN HIS FRONT ROOM WATCHING T.V. (FLICKERING T.V. LIGHT EFF



DIB IS WATCHING HIS FAVORITE SHOW MYSTERIOUS MYSTERIES WHEN..,

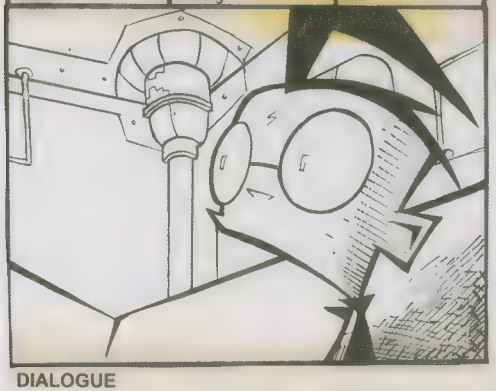


SUDDENLY A SHADOWY FIGURE BEGINS TO FORM ON SCREEN.

(STATIC EFX AS FIGURE FADES IN)

(NOTE: FLICKERING T.V. LIGHT EFX SC. ___ THRU SC. ___)

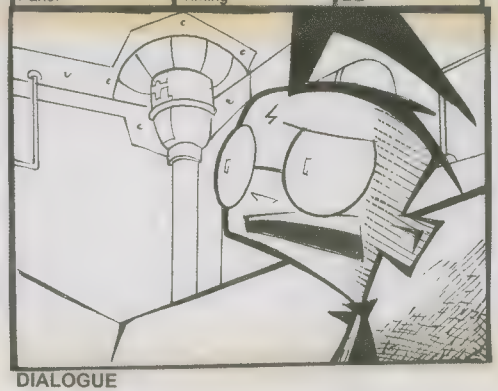
Scene
Panel | Timing | BG



DIALOGUE

DIB IS STARING AT SCREEN CONFUSED

Scene
Panel | Timing | BG



DIALOGUE

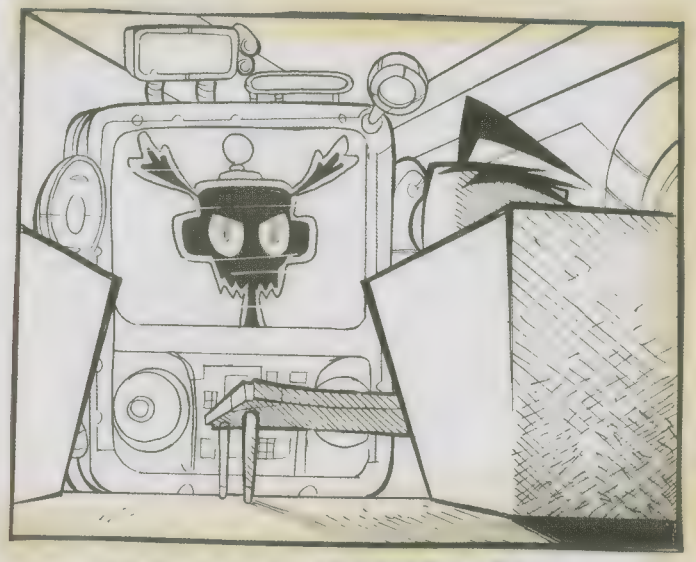
WHAT THE—?

Scene
Panel | Timing | BG

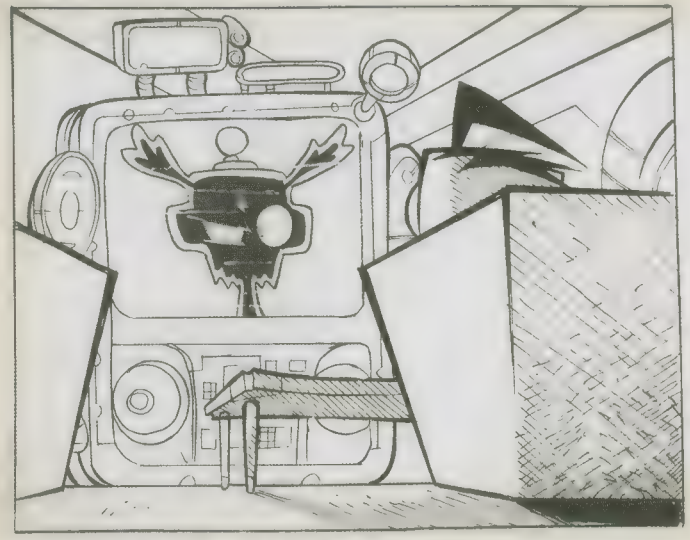
CONTINUE NEXT PG.

DIALOGUE

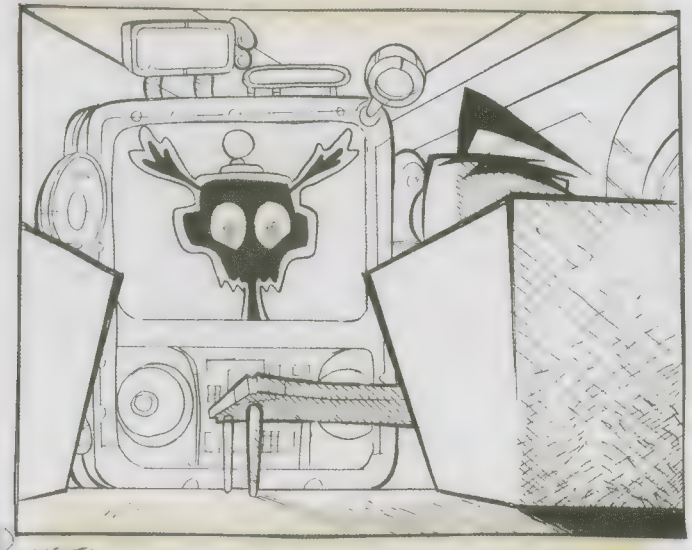
This spread: "Invader Poonchy" storyboards continued.



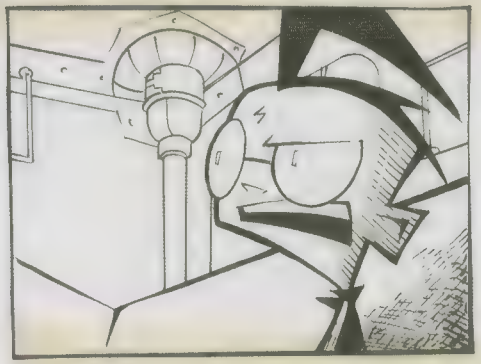
DIALOGUE:
① AGENT DIB. I'AM AGENT...



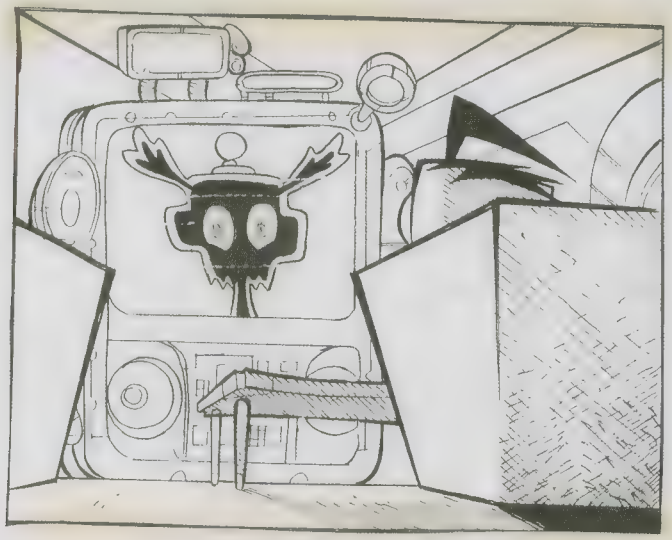
ZIM PAUSES TO THINK
② DIALOGUE:
... EH...

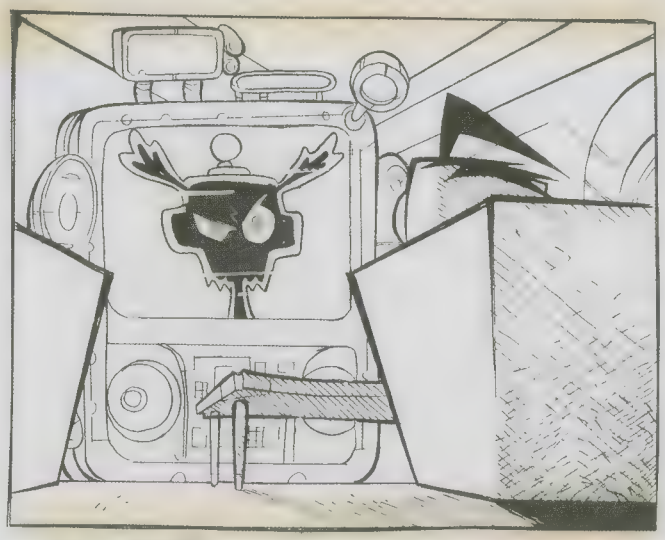


③ DIALOGUE: LOONYPANTS HE HE FROM THE SWOLLEN

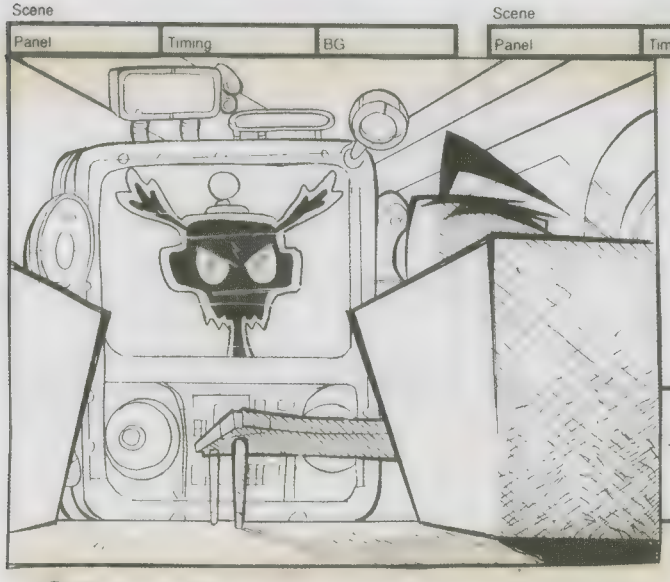


DIALOGUE:





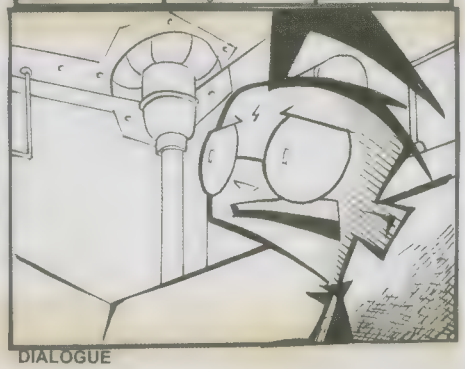
ZIM REACTS



Scene | Panel | Timing | BG

Scene | Panel | Timing | BG

Scene | Panel | Timing | BG

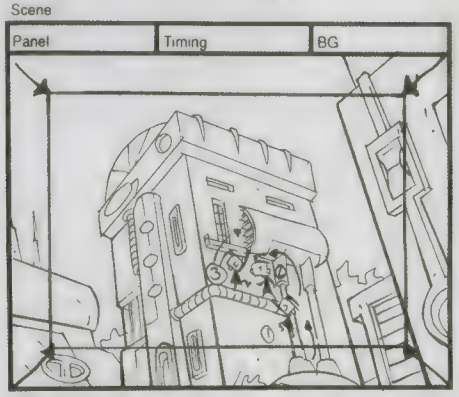


DIALOGUE

(2) DIALOGUE.

This spread: "Invader Poonchy" storyboards continued.

Scene | Panel | Timing | BG



DIALOGUE

DIB SCHIMES UP SIDE OF POONCHY'S HOUSE

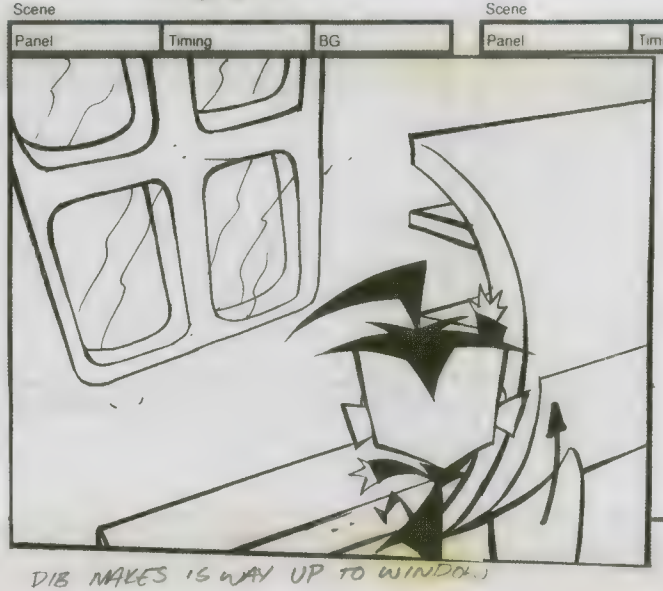
SLOW TRUCK IN AS DIB CLIMBS

① I DUNNO

② ABOUT THIS

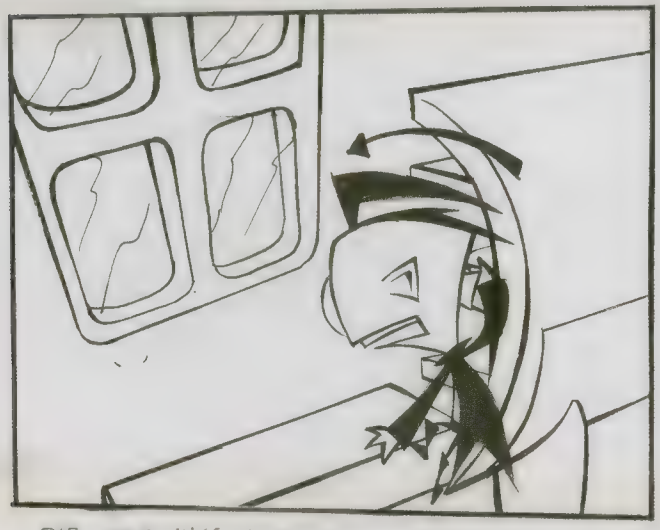
③ SWOLLEN MEATBALL...

Scene | Panel | Timing | BG



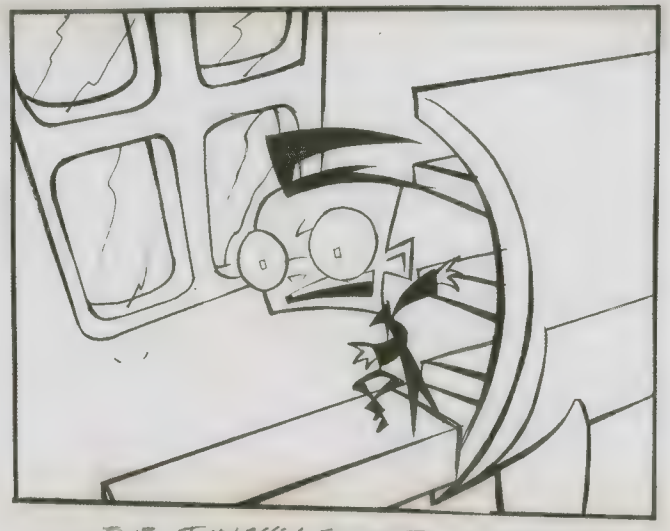
DIB MAKES IS WAY UP TO WINDOW

DIALOGUE ① IF....



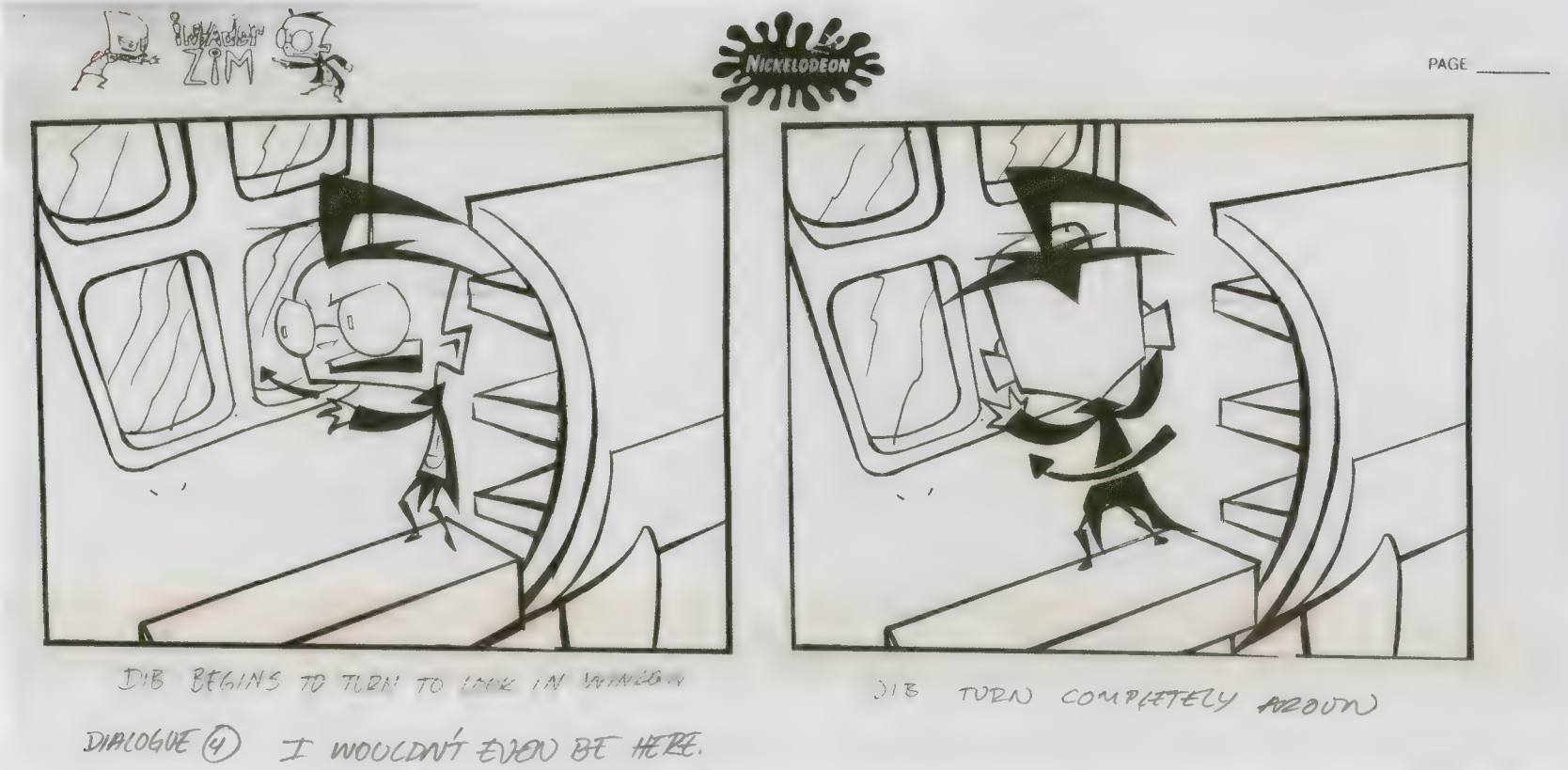
DIB CONTINUES CLIMBING

DIALOGUE ② ...TONIGHTS...

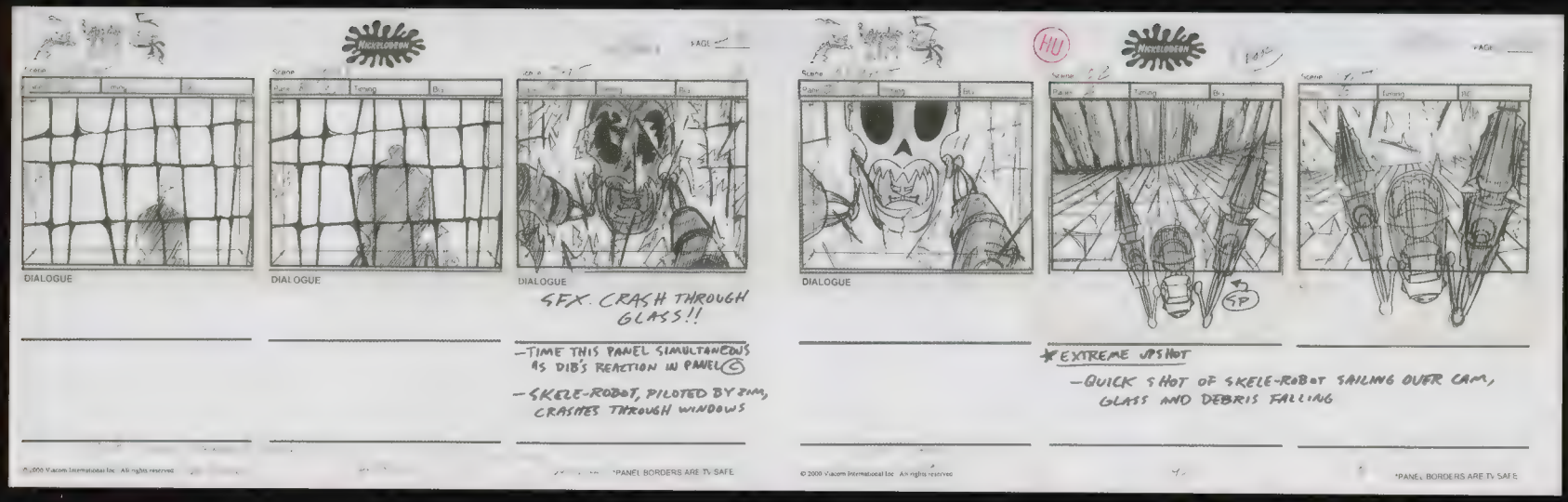


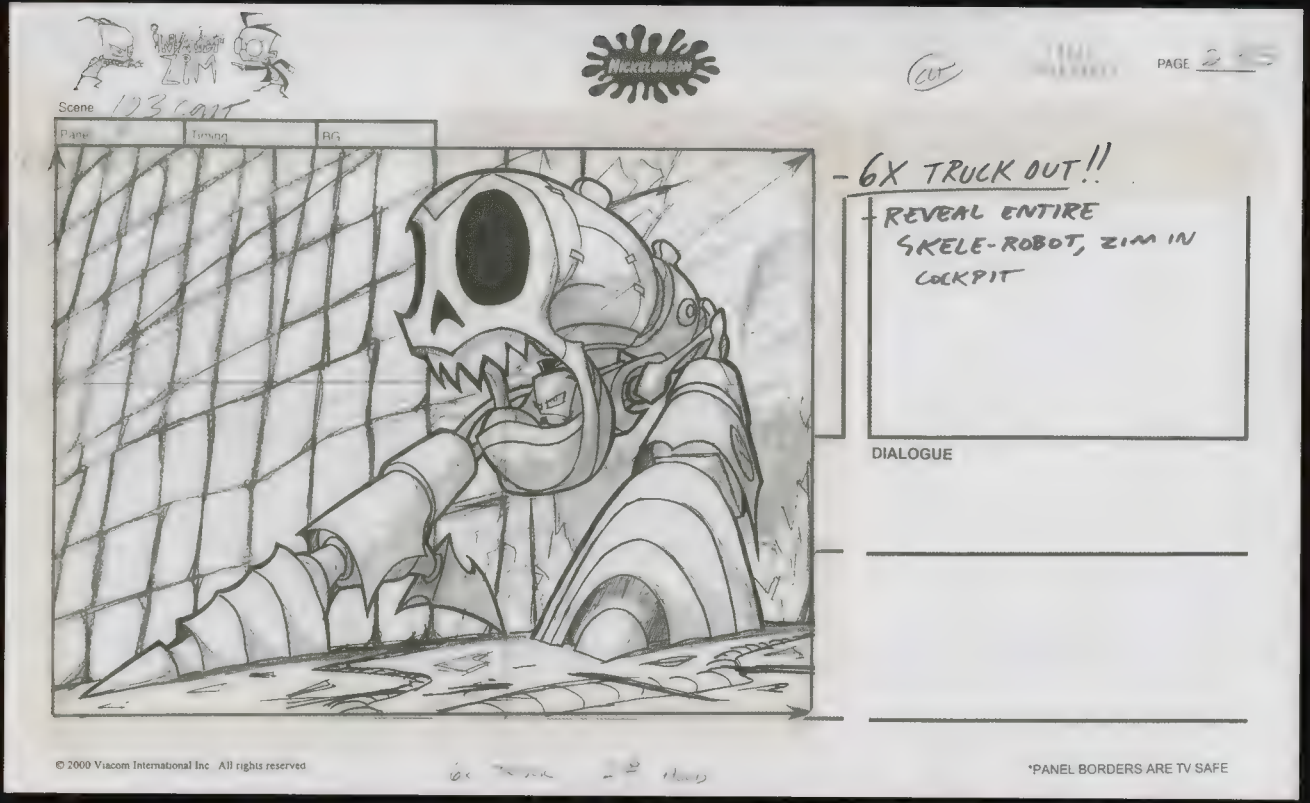
DIB FINALLY SETTLES ON LEDGE OUTSIDE OF POONCHY'S BEDROOM

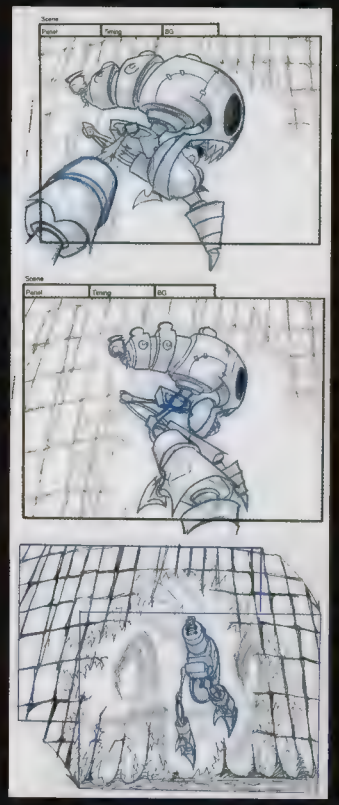
DIALOGUE ③ ...MYSTERIOUS MYSTERIES MAKES A DERUN...



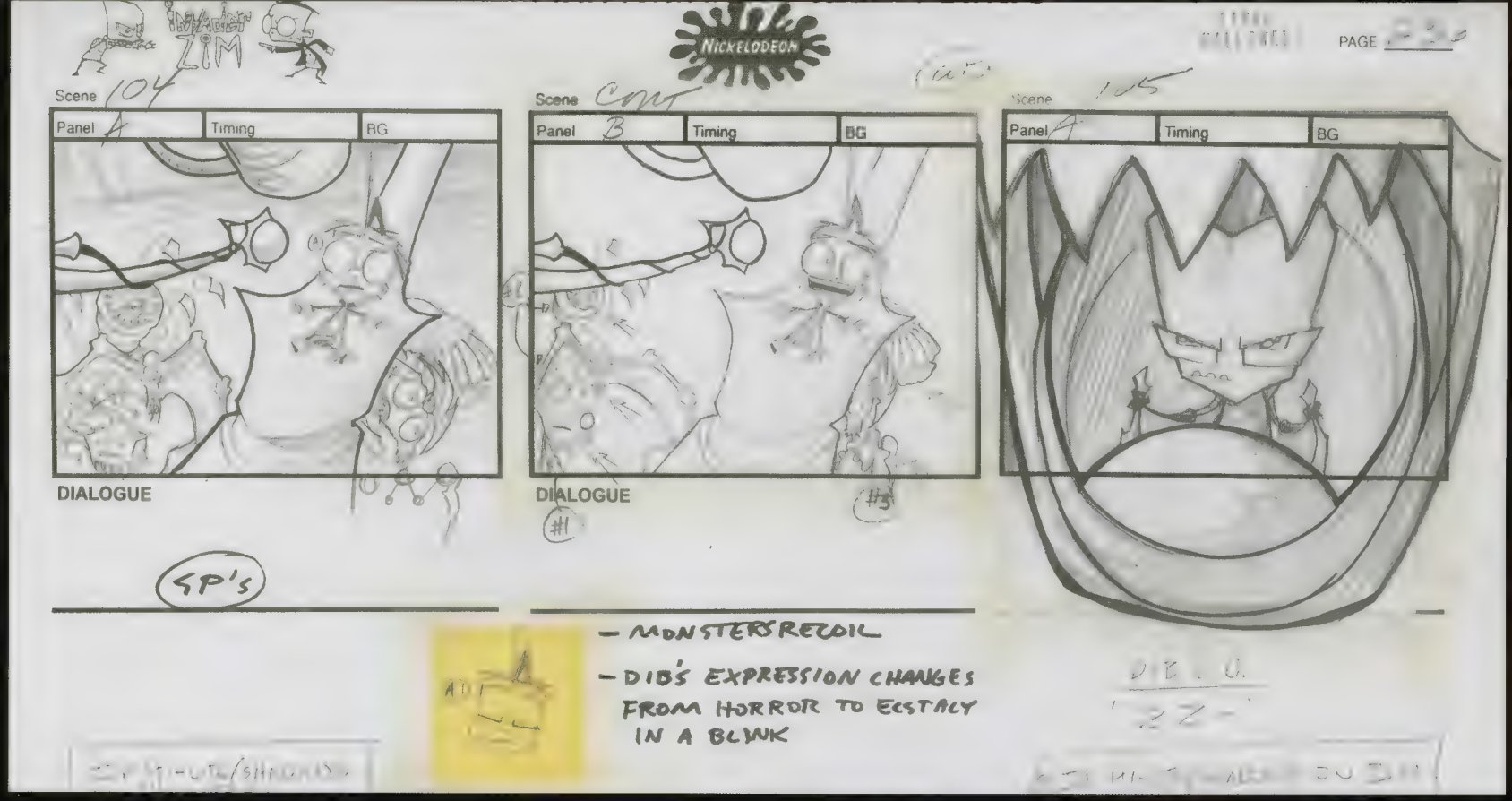
This spread: "Invader Poonchy" character designs above: the General, Dr. Spanky, Laser Specialist, Ted Slunchy, Reporter-Style, and Beef Gir.

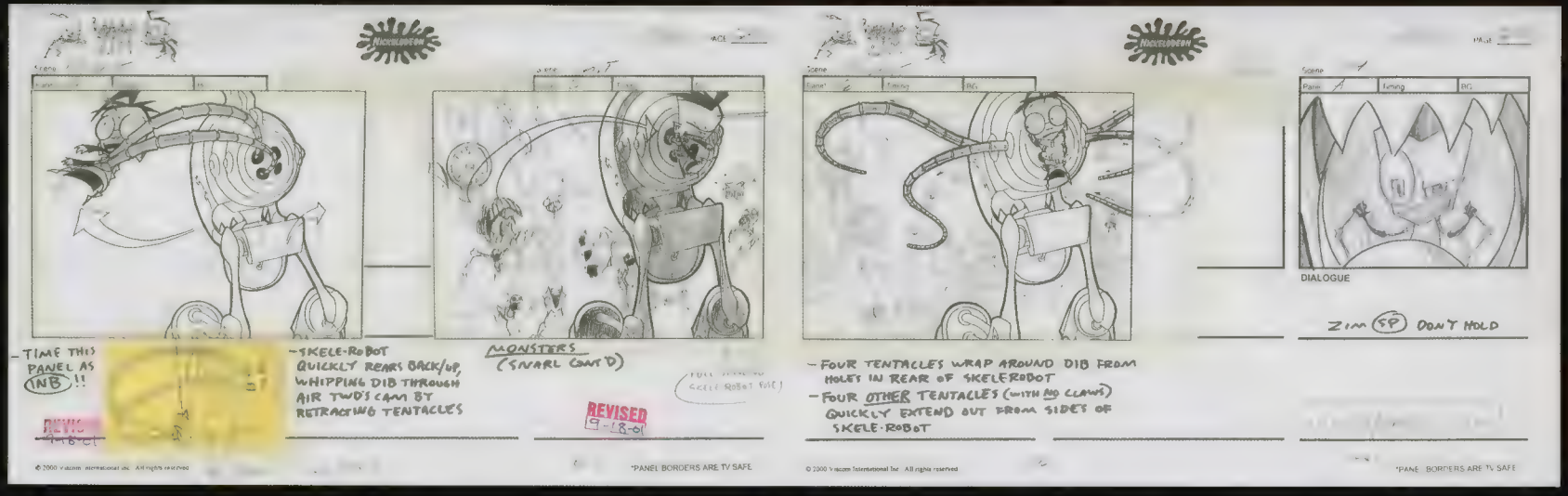






STORYBOARDS





This spread: "Halloween Spectacular of Spooky Doom" (EP14) storyboard panels showing complex horror technology in action.

Overleaf: a horrifying array of stills from the episode.

BACKGROUNDS

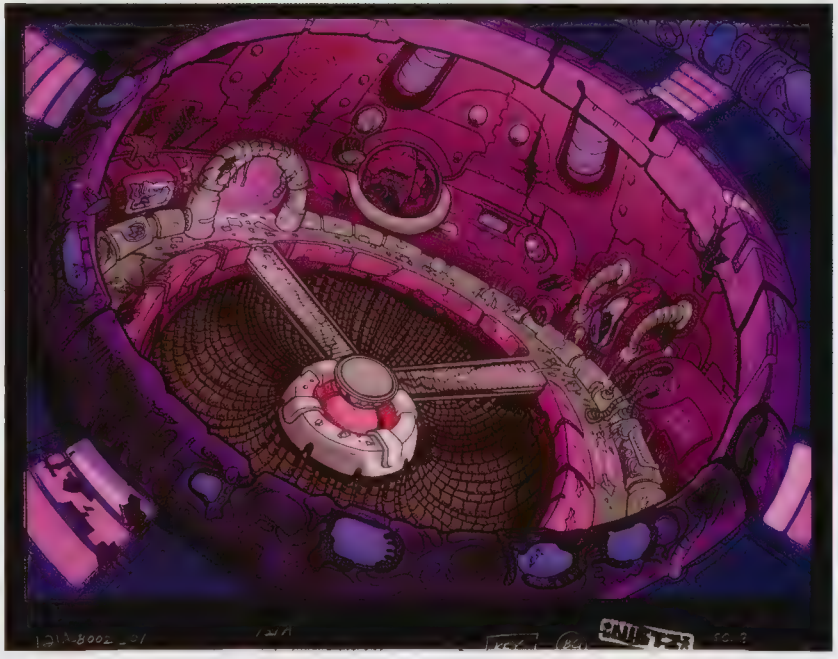
The background designers on *Zim* were required to be inventive and efficient while executing at a high technical level on paper.

Spencer G. Davis [background designer]: We found the style after a time by exploring how to make it feel like alien technology existing in our current world. One thing we did a heck of a lot of was tubing. There was tubing going everywhere. We got really good at drawing pipes and tubing and stuff that was organic.

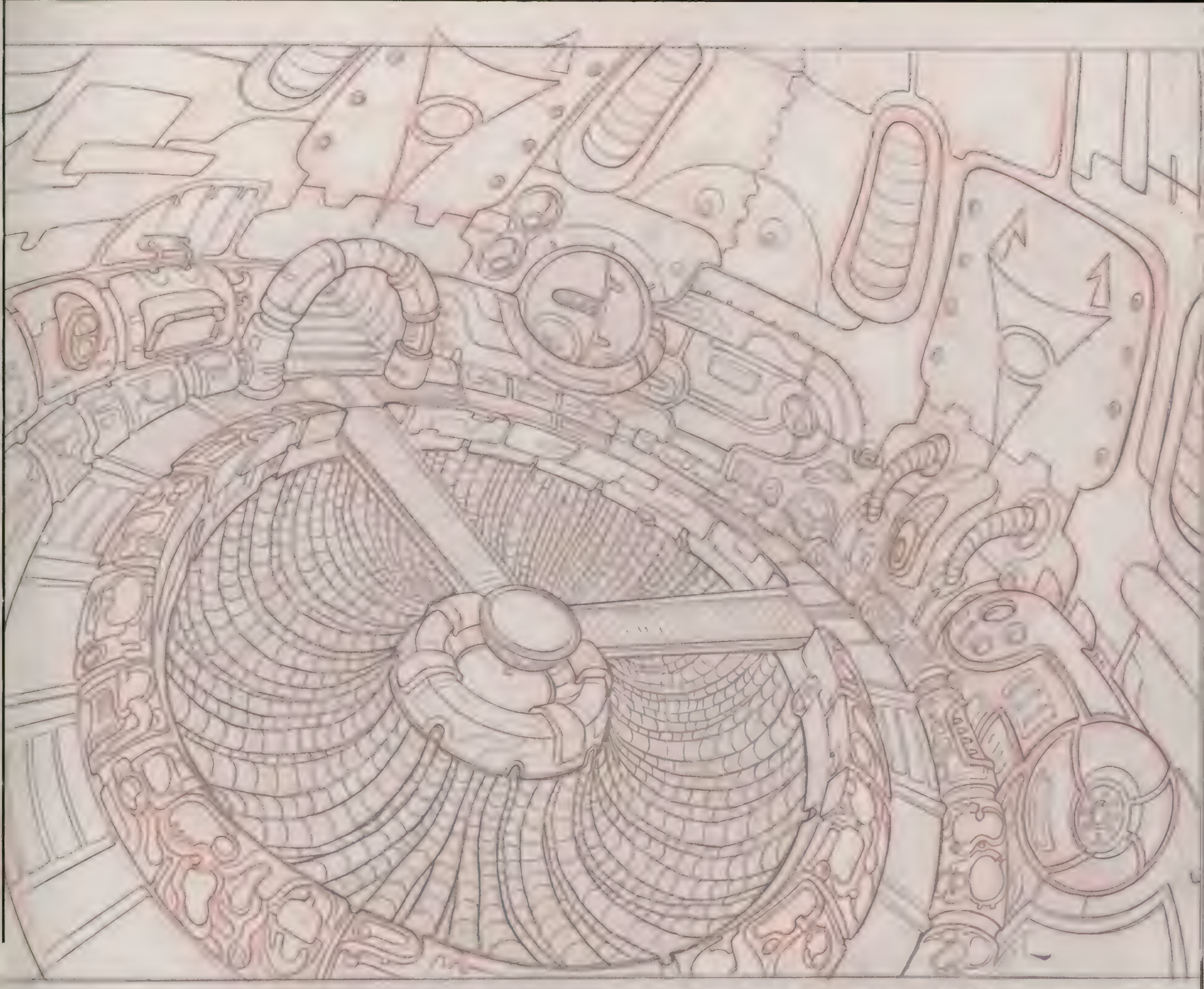
Jairo Lizarazu [background designer]: This was prior to computers in the process when we would still walk around the studio with our ellipses guides and S-curves. With the tubes and openings I always felt that there was a real arachnid sense, or insect-like honeycomb of tubes and shafts that would take you into a place.

Spencer: It was modular too. There were forms that looked like you could pull them apart and wrap them around and put them together the other way. I picked up a lot of that from Jairo.

Jairo: And that what was so cool, we each had our own fortes, and when we got together, looking around we picked stuff up off each other.



This spread: Layout drawings by Spencer G. Davis from the episode "Backseat Drivers from Beyond the Stars" (EP21).



BACK SEAT DRIVER 121A S.2 BG KEY

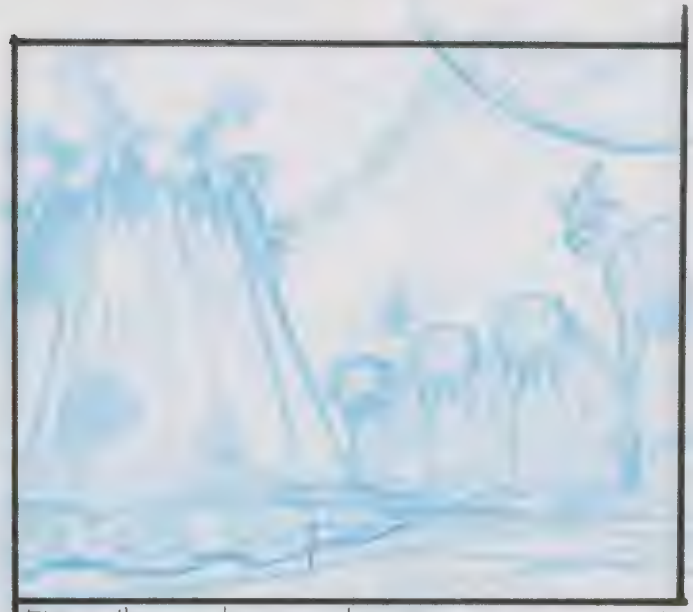
121A_B002_01

Need Irkan Logos more metal floor paneling extending out to a laser fence.

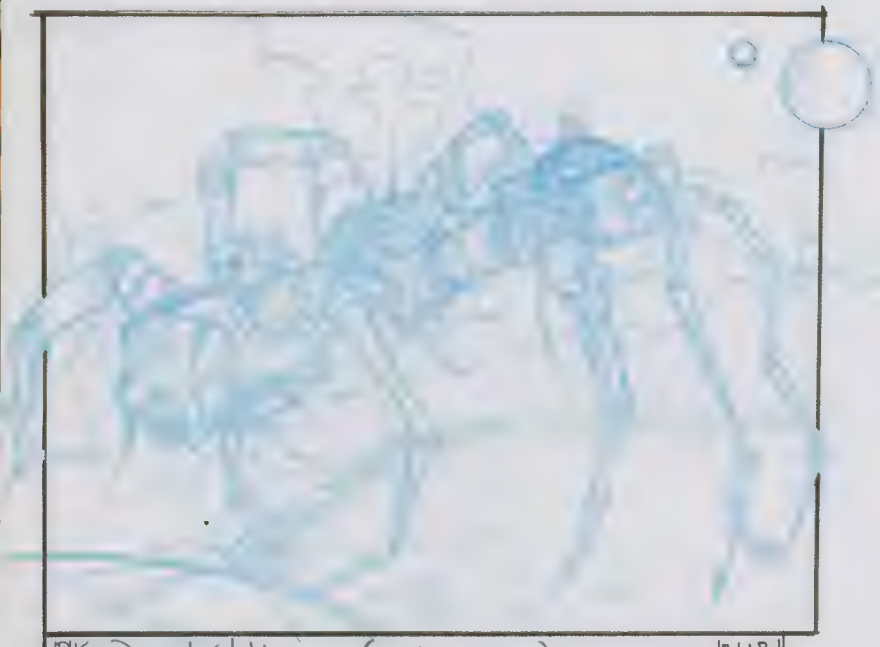
Irkan flags on posts.

INFO PASSED ON TO S.B ARTISTS

TAK THE HIDEOUS NEW GIRL 'EXT. PLANET DEVASTATED' 120A.



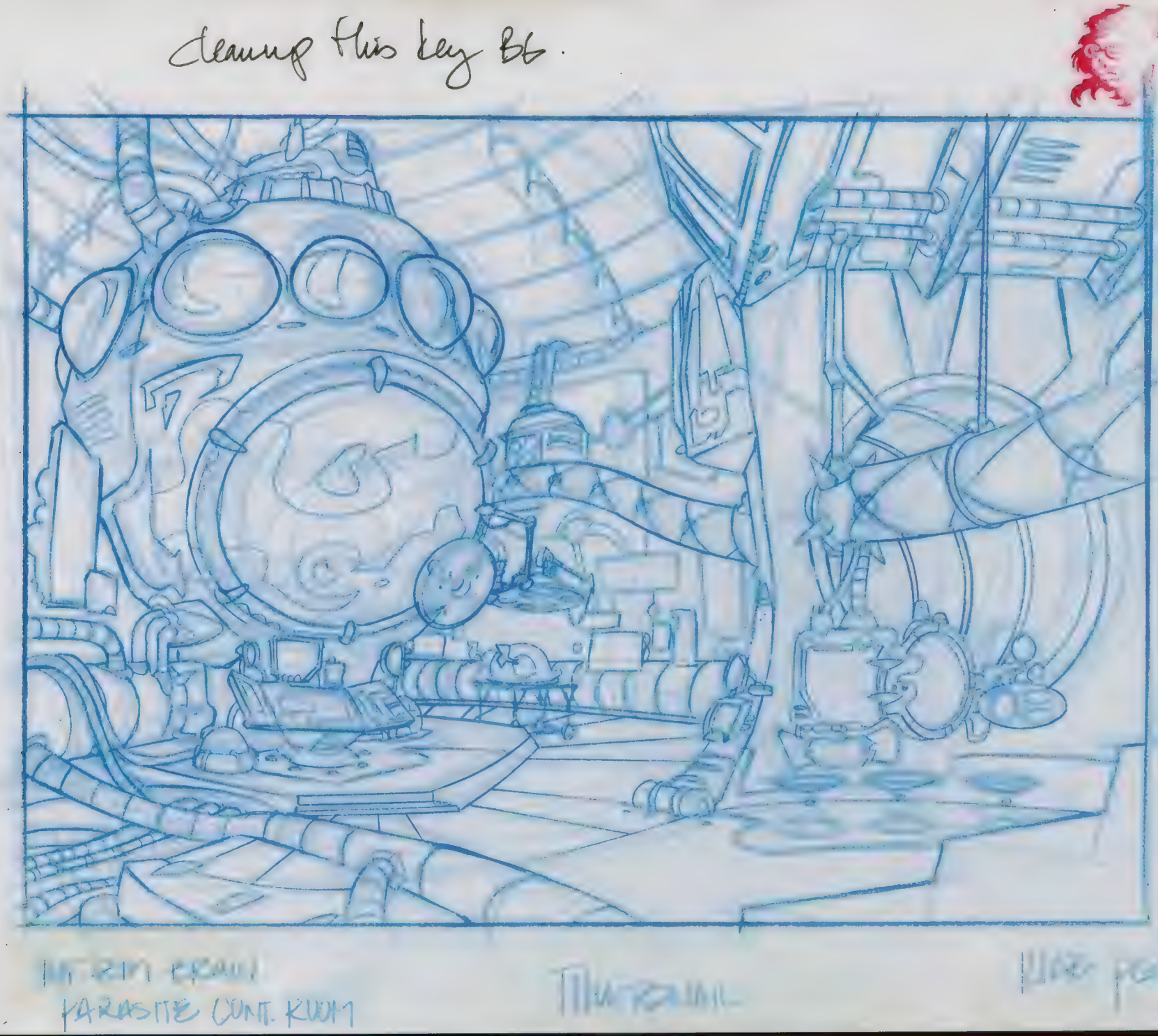
TAK THE HIDEOUS NEW GIRL 'EXT. IRKEN TEST CENTER GROUNDS. 120A.



IRKEN DRYDOCK STATION (NEW THUMBNAIL) 121AB PARANOID

THE TRIAL SPACE STATION 126AB FEB. B. THUMBNAIL

BACKGROUND THUMBNAILS

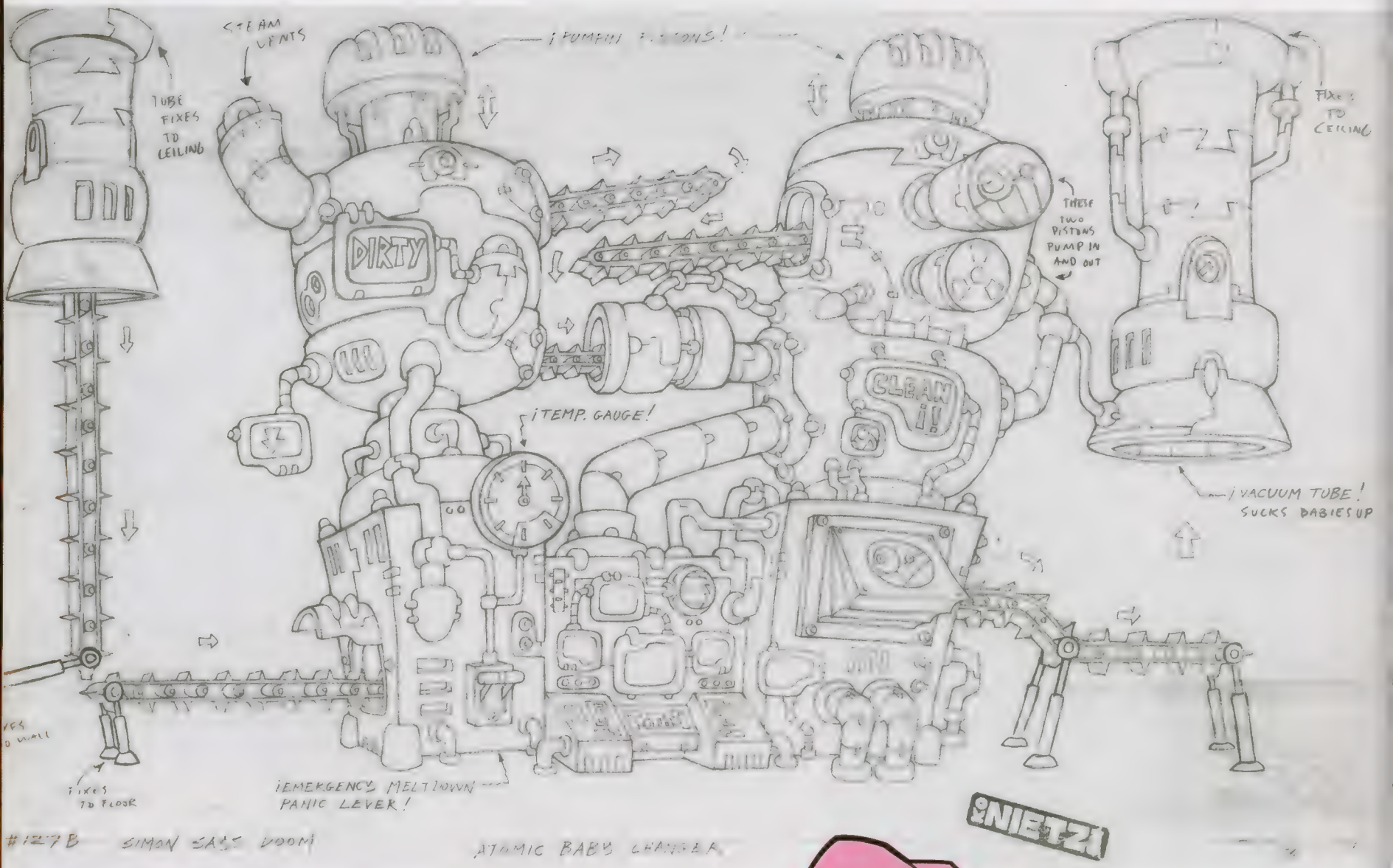


This spread: Fairly complex "thumbnail" drawings were created by background designers to get approval for the location designs, and then to distribute to both the board artist teams who were drawing characters in the locations, and to background artists to finish as key background art layouts. Another way to describe such precise thumbnails in the studio vernacular: "done-nails." Art by background designer Jairo Lizarazu.

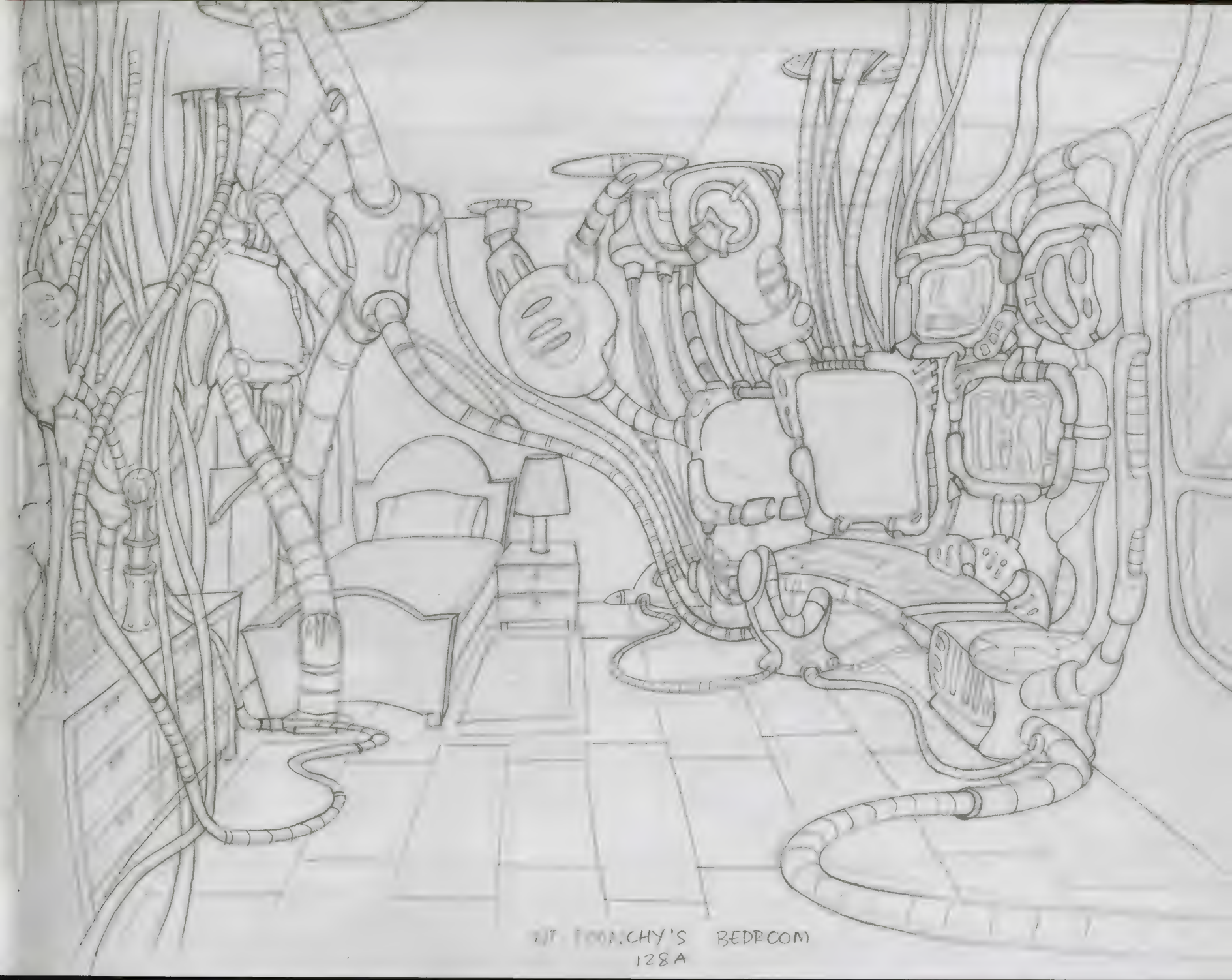
BACKGROUND THUMBNAILS

Opposite: A thumbnail layout of the Membrane's garage with Tak's ship inside of it from the episode "Backseat Drivers from Beyond the Stars" (EP21). A sticky note with revision requests illustrates the utility of only finishing a layout to this rough form before seeking approval. Background artist Maurice Morgan may have taken the saying "blood, sweat, and tears" literally, depending on the source for the brown smudge at the bottom.

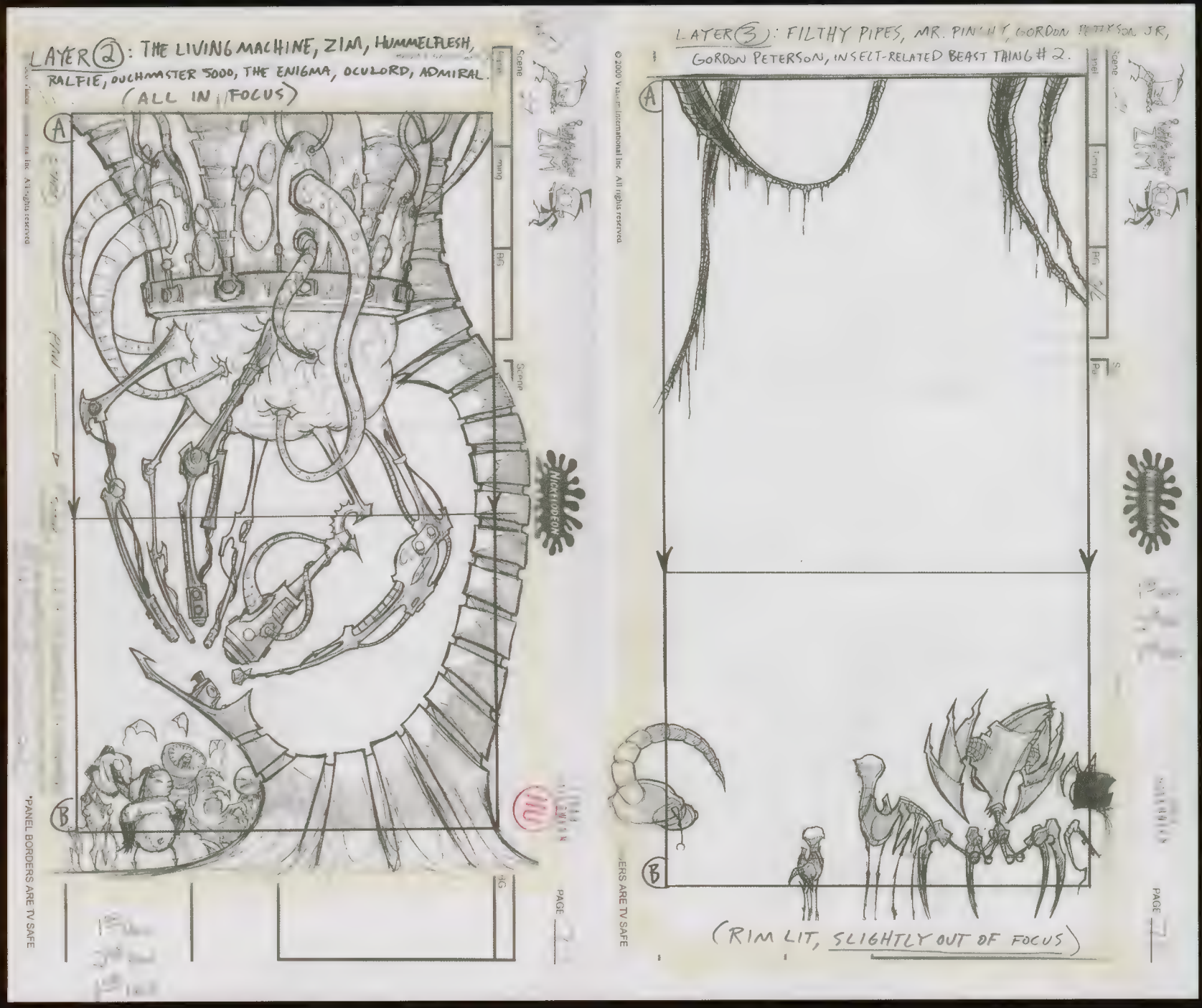
Above: Sketched elevations, thumbnails, a layout, and colored backgrounds depicting the Membrane's garage, bottom right by Jairo Lizarazu.



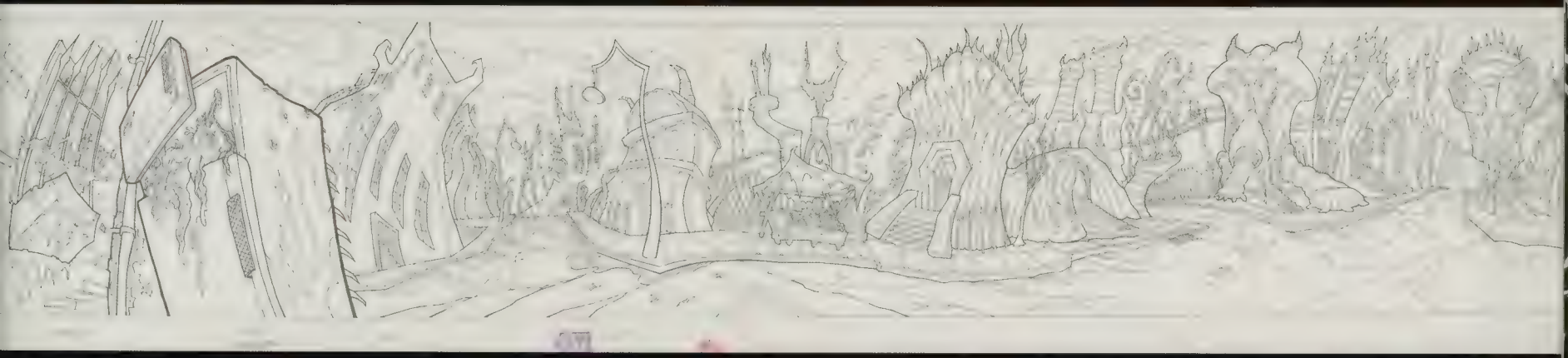
BACKGROUND DESIGN

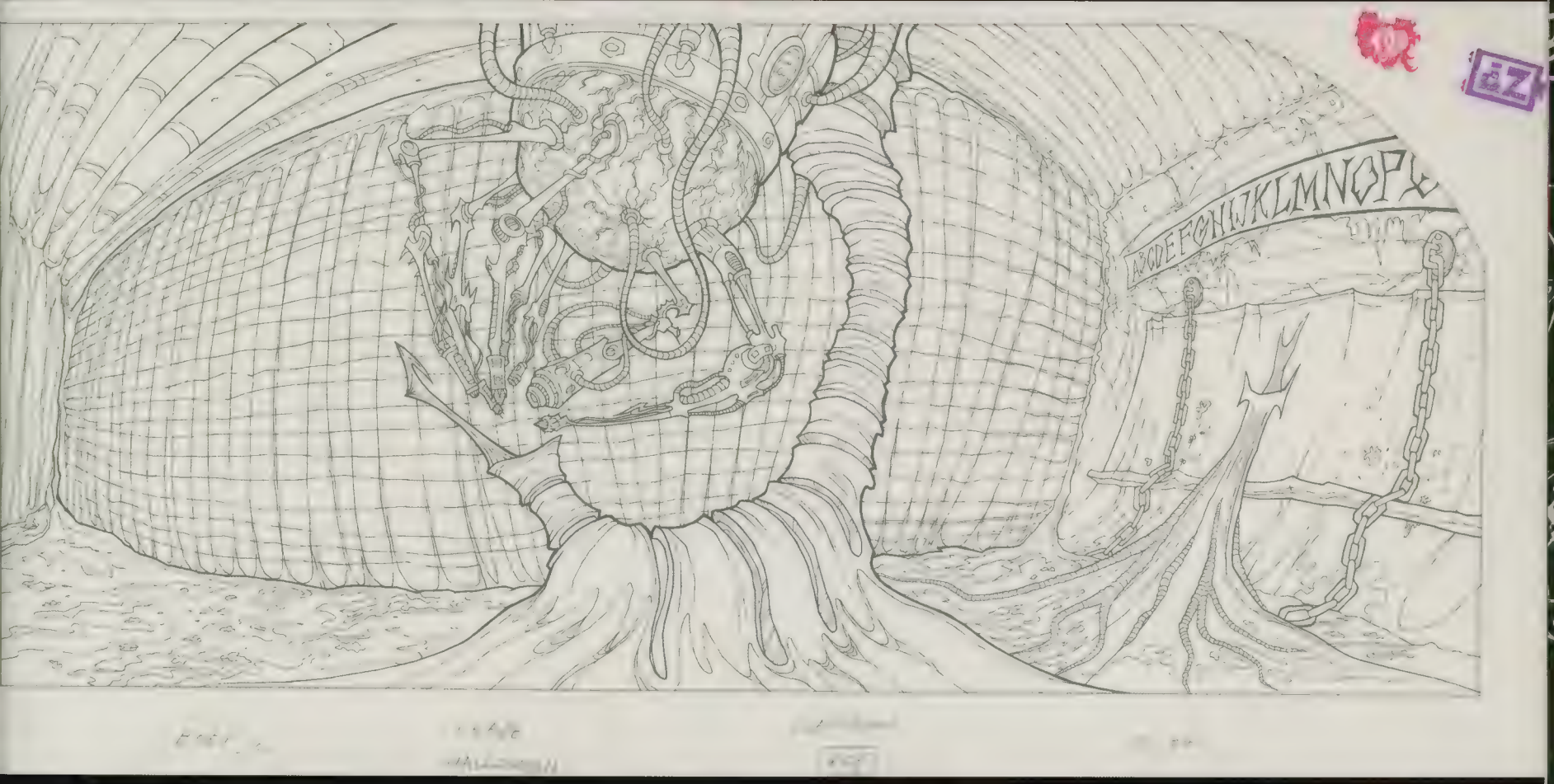


This spread: A prop design and layout drawing from the unfinished episode "Simon Says Doom."

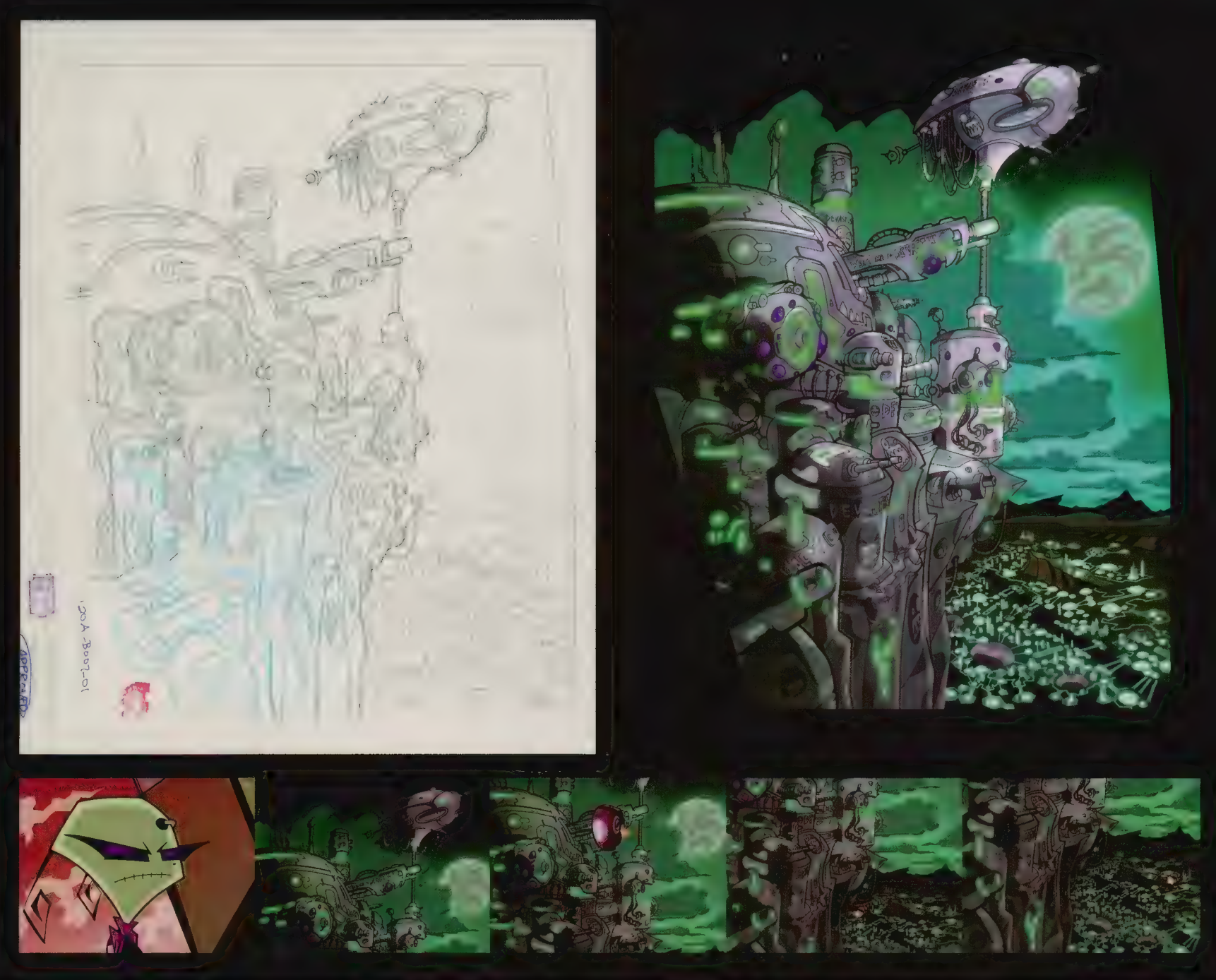


BACKGROUND DESIGN



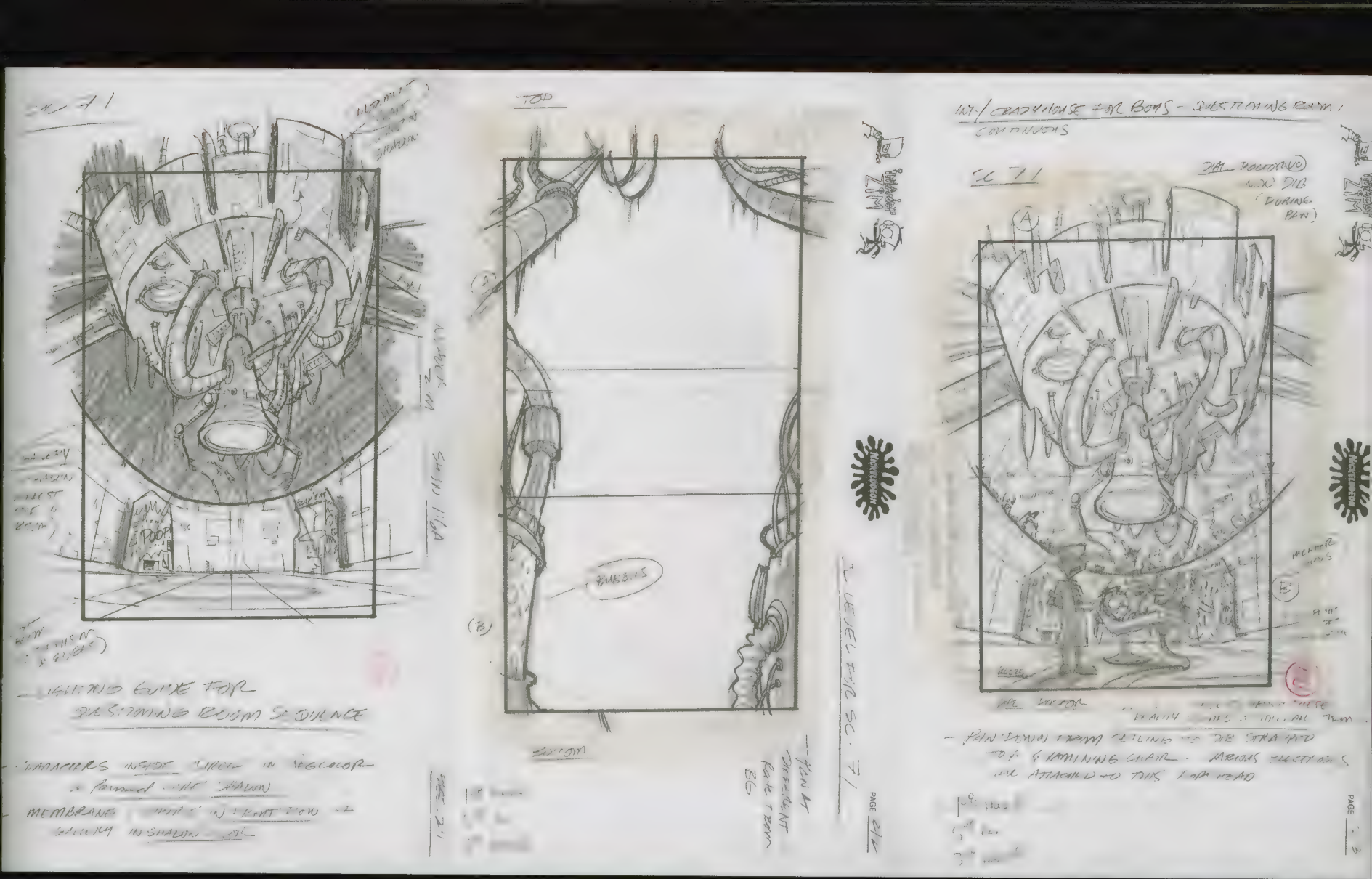


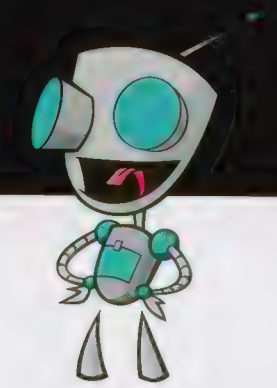
This spread: The horror element in *Zim* comes out strong in the "Halloween Spectacular of Spooky Doom" (EP14) in these storyboard panels and layout drawings.



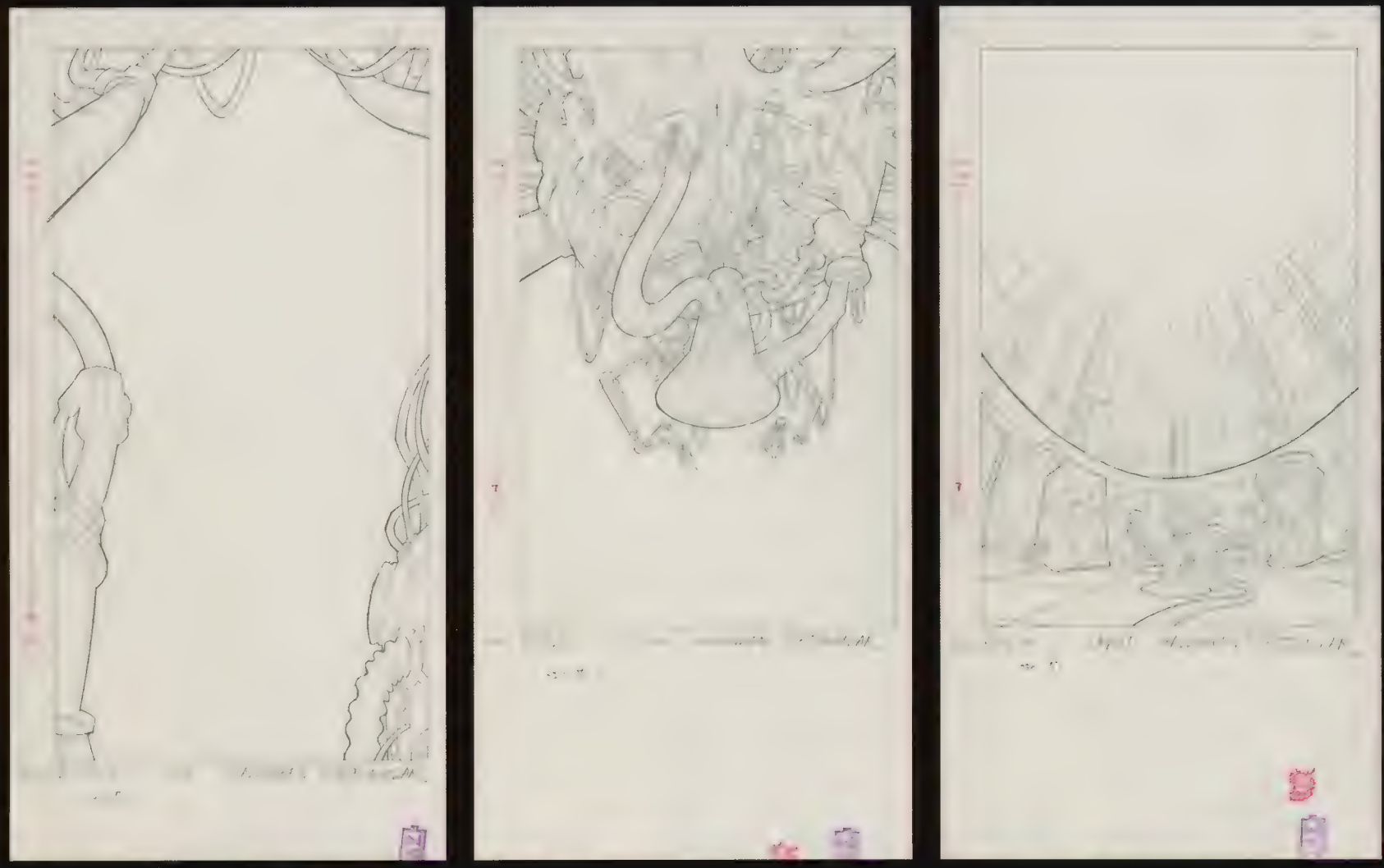
BACKGROUND DESIGN

Above: The above stills from the episode "Tak the Hideous New Girl" (EP20) illustrate the final usage of the above vertical layout drawing and final digitally painted background art. To create the effect of a camera move, the background art must be created taller, wider, or both, than the frame.





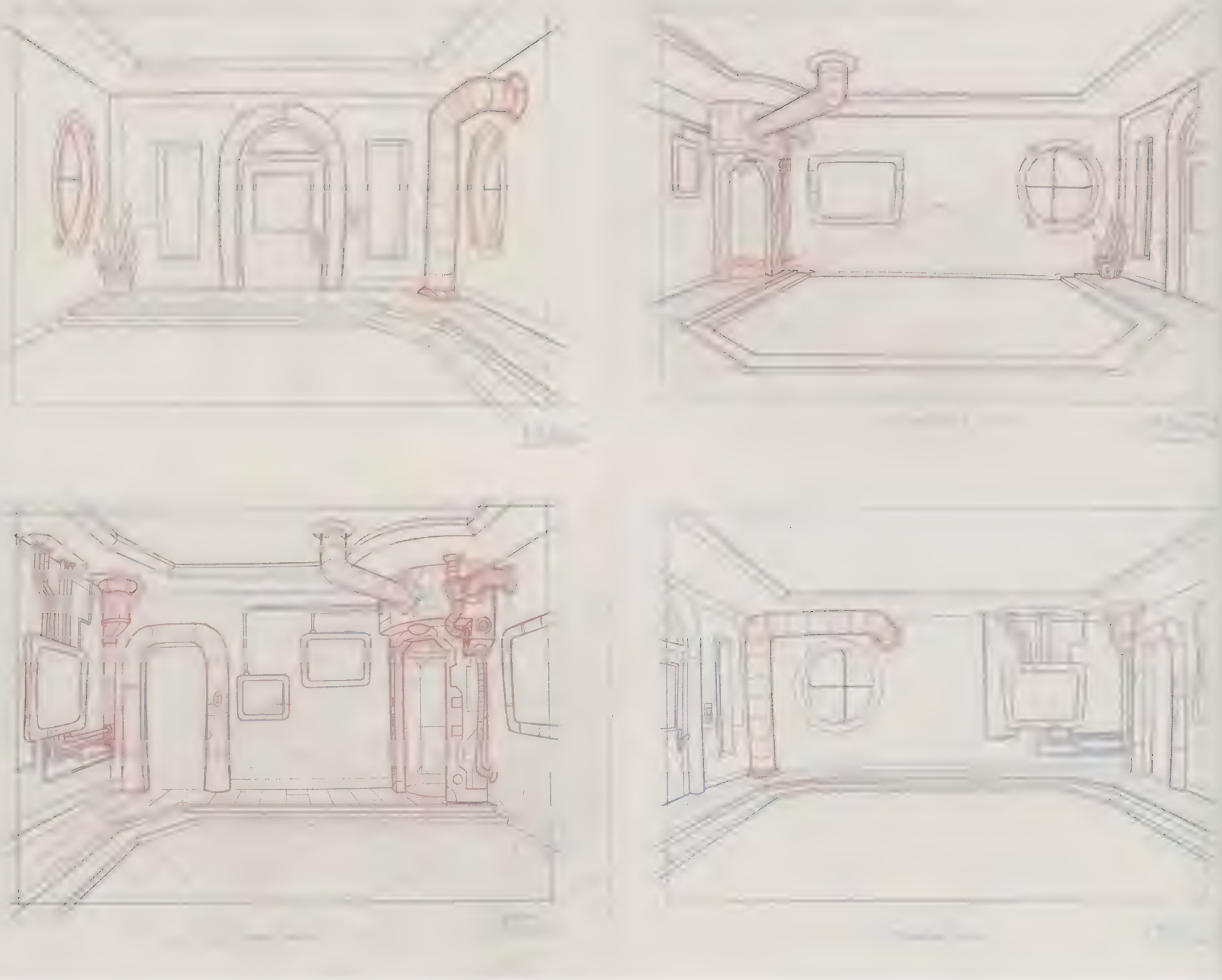
Above: Three pages of storyboards for the episode "Halloween Spectacular of Spooky Doom" (EP14) were used to plan and visually describe scene 71, a single shot. The vertical camera move pans down a threatening looking machine in the Crazy House for Boys under which Dib awaits his fate. The center page shows the overlay foreground elements that pan at a slightly faster rate than the background, creating a parallax effect.



BACKGROUND DESIGN

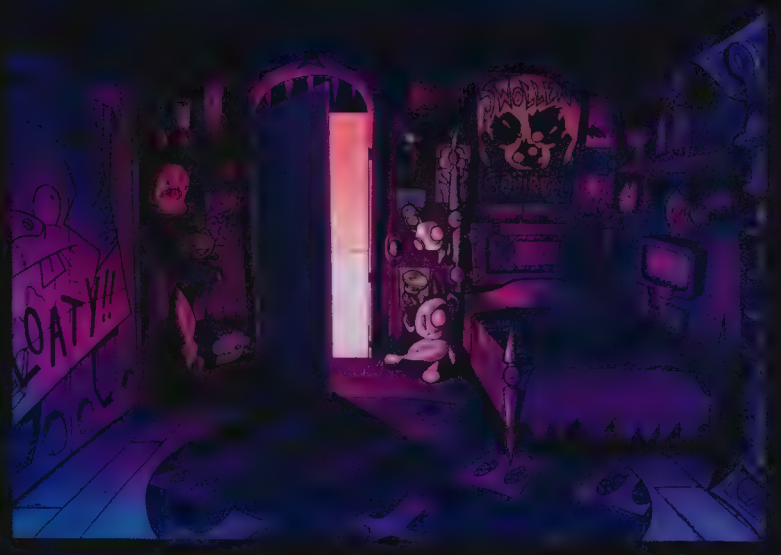
This spread: Additional layout drawings (above) and a background art detail (opposite) from scene 71 in the episode "Halloween Spectacular of Spooky Doom" (EP14) illustrate the evolution from the storyboard panels on the previous spread.

POP
DO A
POOP
MEAT
FROG

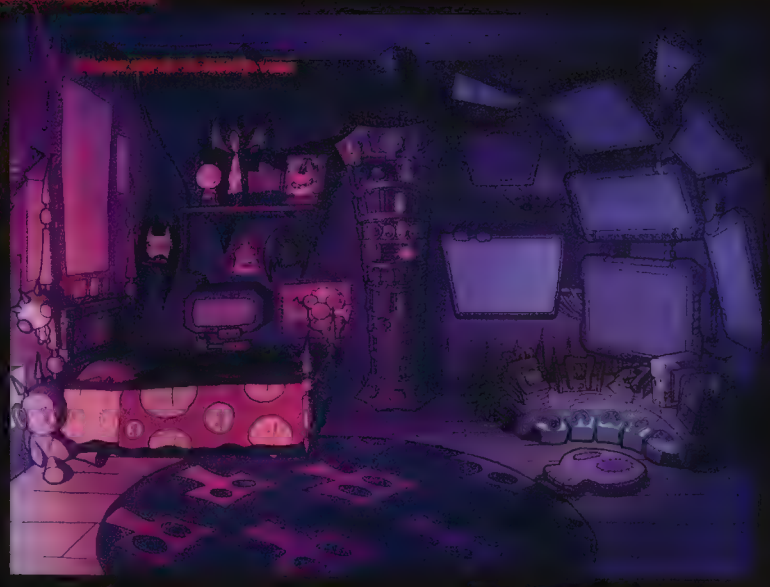


BACKGROUND DESIGN

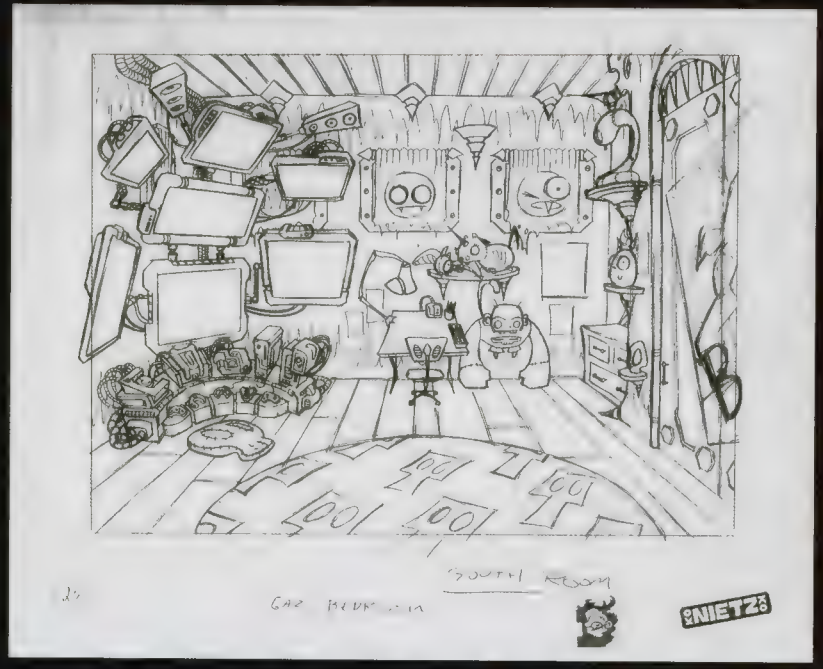
Above: Four views of the revised Membrane living room without the overlays of the furniture included. Art by Maurice Morgan.



GAZ BEDROOM NORTH VIEW
125A_B001_01



125A_B003_01
GAZ BEDROOM EAST VIEW



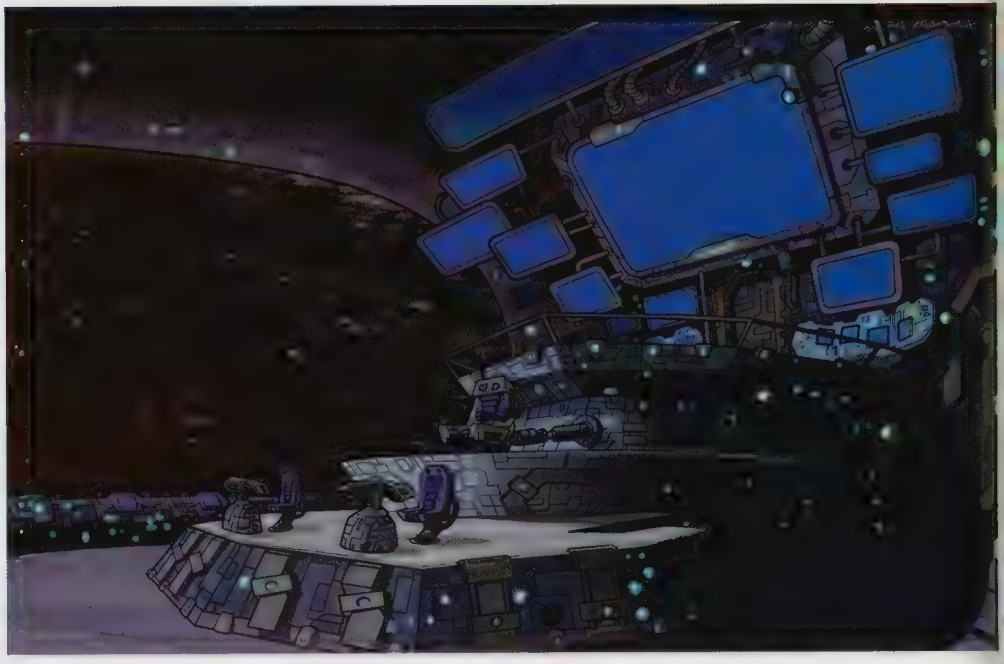
SOUTH ROOM

125A_B004_01
GAZ'S BEDROOM WEST VIEW

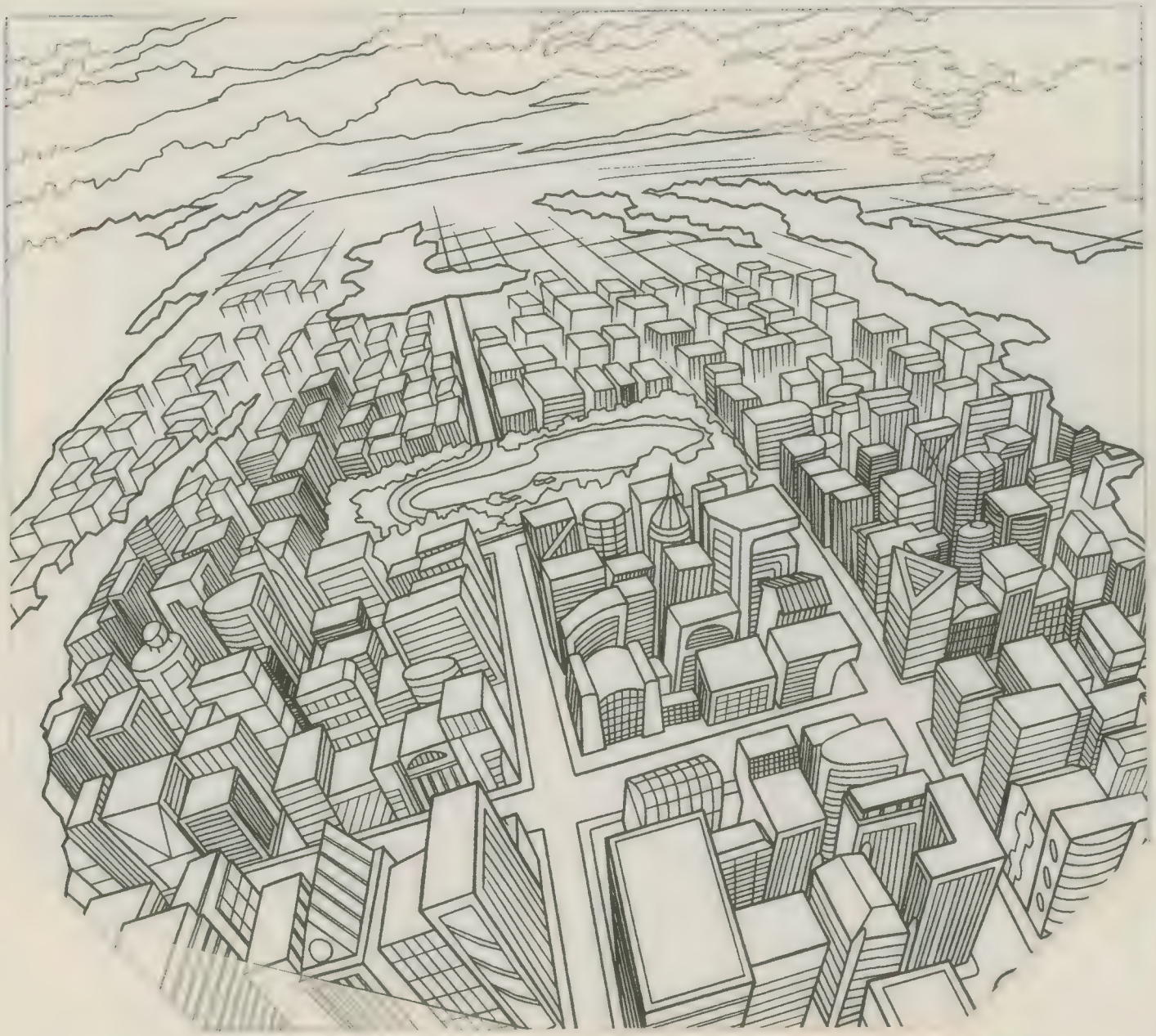
Above: Four views of Gaz's spooky bedroom, including a layout drawing and three fully colored background pieces.

121A-BG29

121A_BG24



BACKGROUND DESIGN



112B_B033_01

Opposite: Three layout drawings and a painted background of the interior of the Vortian ship that The Resisty group of rebel aliens use when attacking the Iriken armada and their flagship *Massive*, from the episode "Backseat Drivers from Beyond the Stars" (EP21).

Above: Another complex view of the city back on Earth, from the episode "Game Slave 2" (EP12B). Art by Maurice Morgan.

B 875. 02 OL

DOG BRAIN
108

KEY

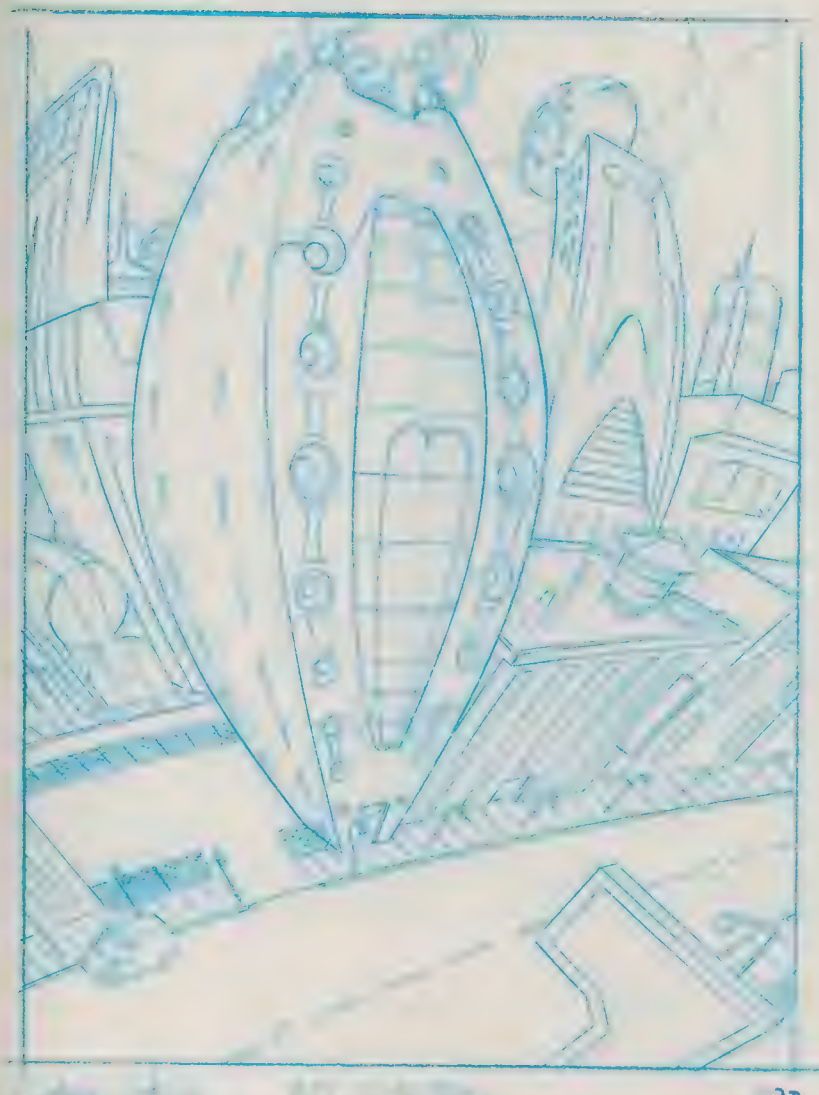
SC. 204 OL

B 875. 01

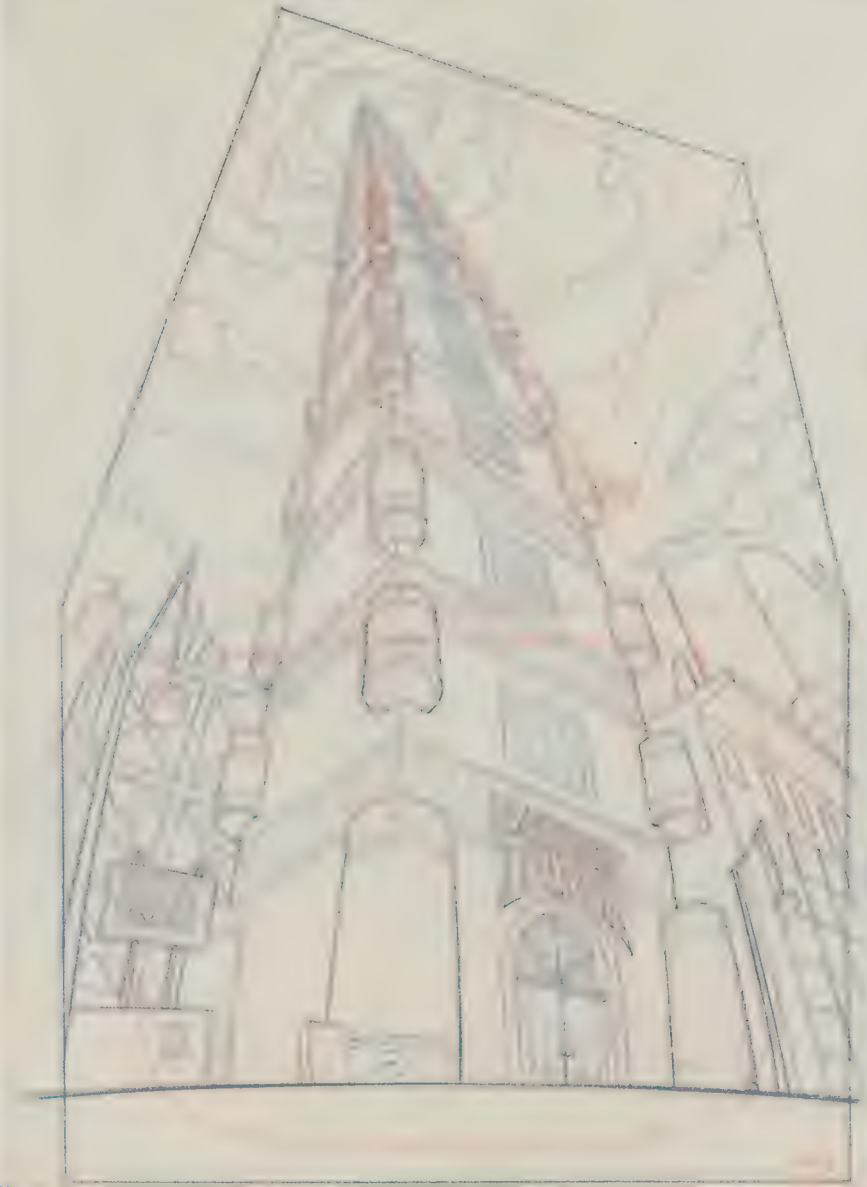
DOG BRAIN
108 B

KEY

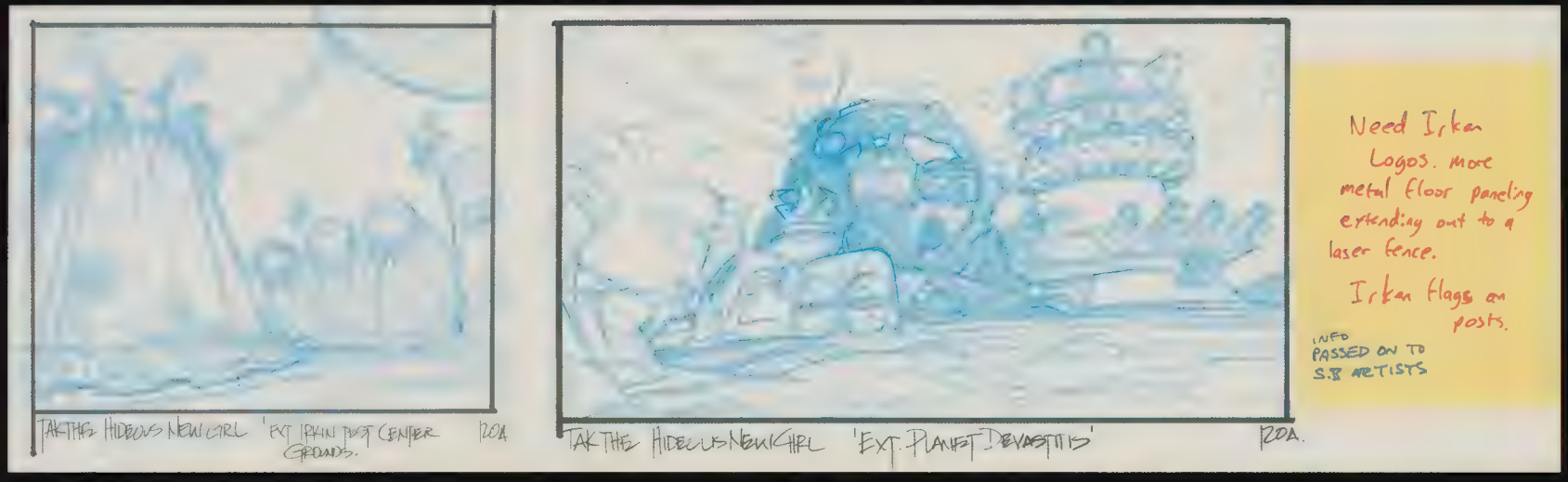
SC. 204



2B

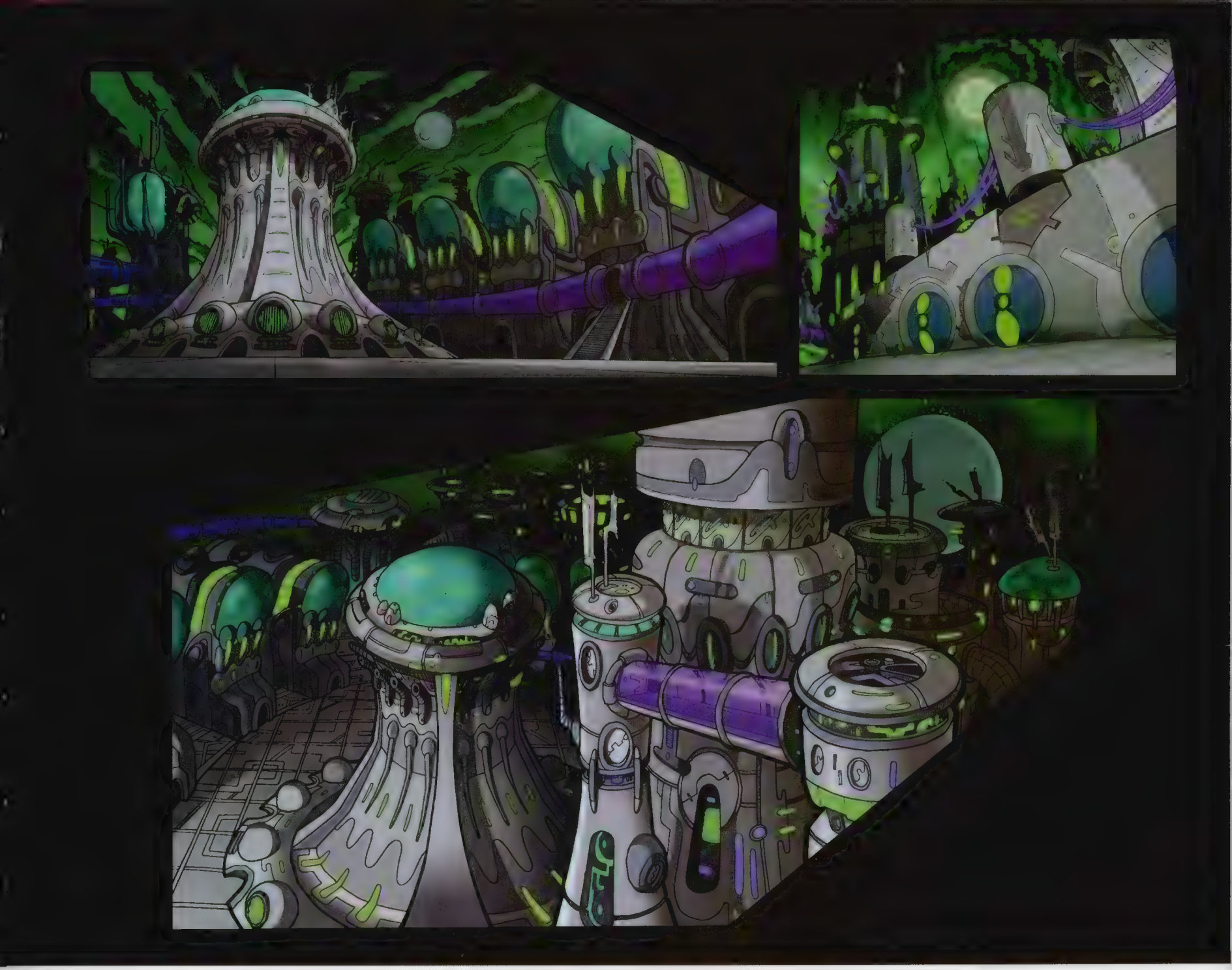


B027_01



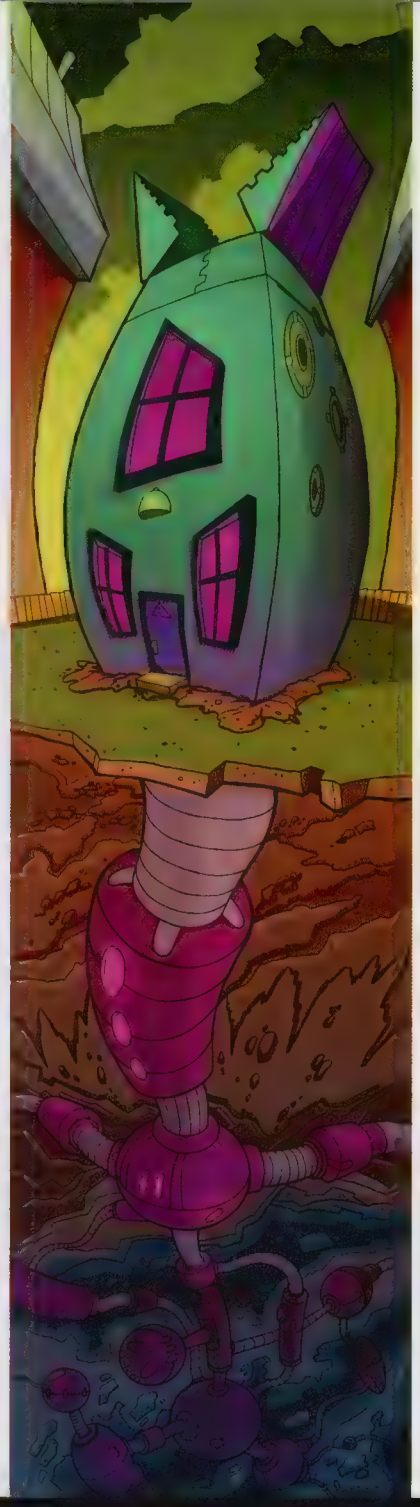
BACKGROUND DESIGN

Previous spread: Examples of how camera moves are designed as single extended drawings that appear to change perspective as they are



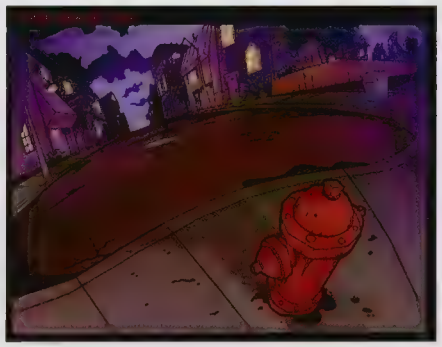
moved across, replicating the sense that the camera has performed a pan, tilt, truck, pedestal, or crane shot. Also included: a drawing layer showing Zim's neighborhood in its destroyed state after being stomped on by the robot-house Gir from "Invasion of the Idiot Dog Brain" (EP8A).

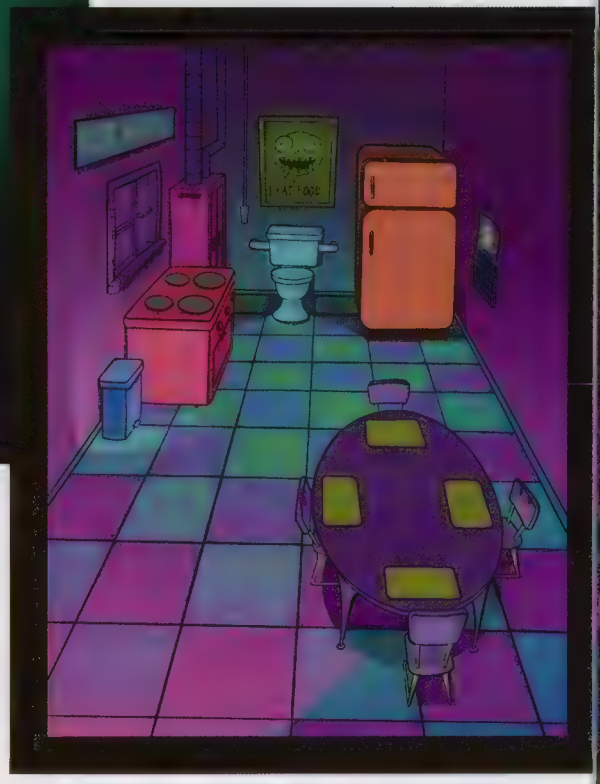
This spread: Key background layout drawing by Spencer G. Davis, two thumbnails by Jairo Lizarazu, and three painted backgrounds designed for camera movement from the episode "Tak the Hideous New Girl" (EP20), yet another completely original Irken location that needed to be invented and designed.

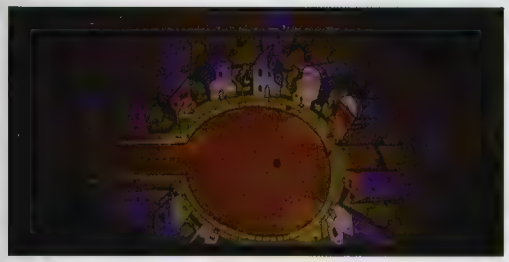


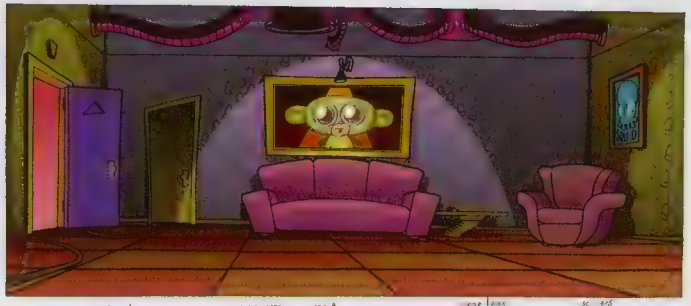
BACKGROUND DESIGN

This spread: Familiar scenes around Zim's secret base show off the signature color designs associated with Zim. Rikki Simons was the color designer.









Raused
11-10-00

Spencer G. Davis [background designer]: "The fact that the show had that really dark edge to it is what made it so cool. That was huge. The color, the lighting." Jairo Lizarazu [background designer]: "Rikki and Jhonen would hang out in a room where it was so dark that you couldn't see your hand in front of your face. All you saw was Rikki lit up with his screen in his eyes and his crazy hair. You'd think 'What the hell is going on in there?' And what Jhonen did to that room; of course he put all kinds of tubes in it."

BACKGROUND DESIGN

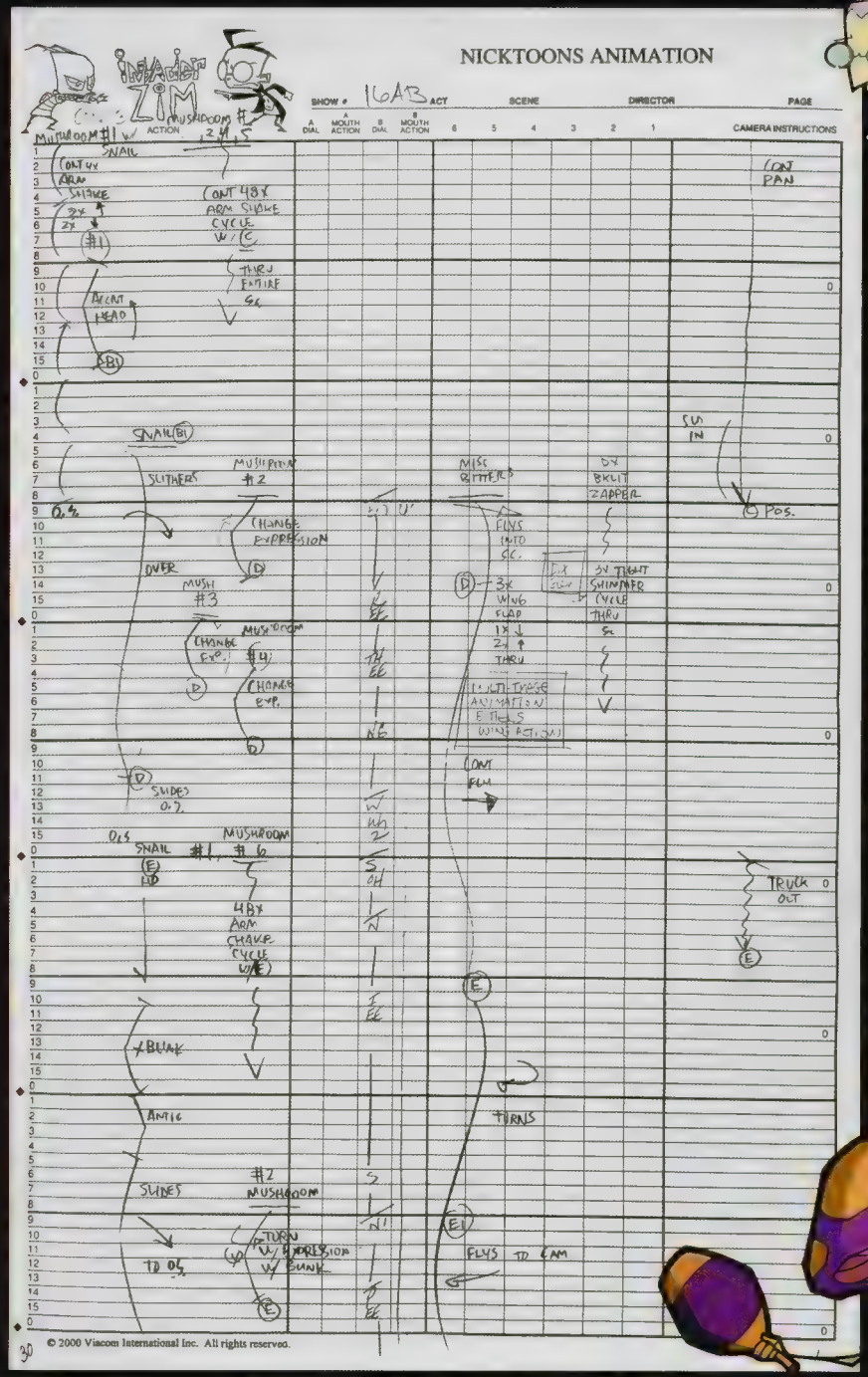
This spread: Background art of the City Cesspool and The City.

BACKGROUND DESIGN

This spread: Two key backgrounds from the episode "Halloween Spectacular of Spooky Doom" (EP14) and stills of the vertical pan above as seen in the episode.

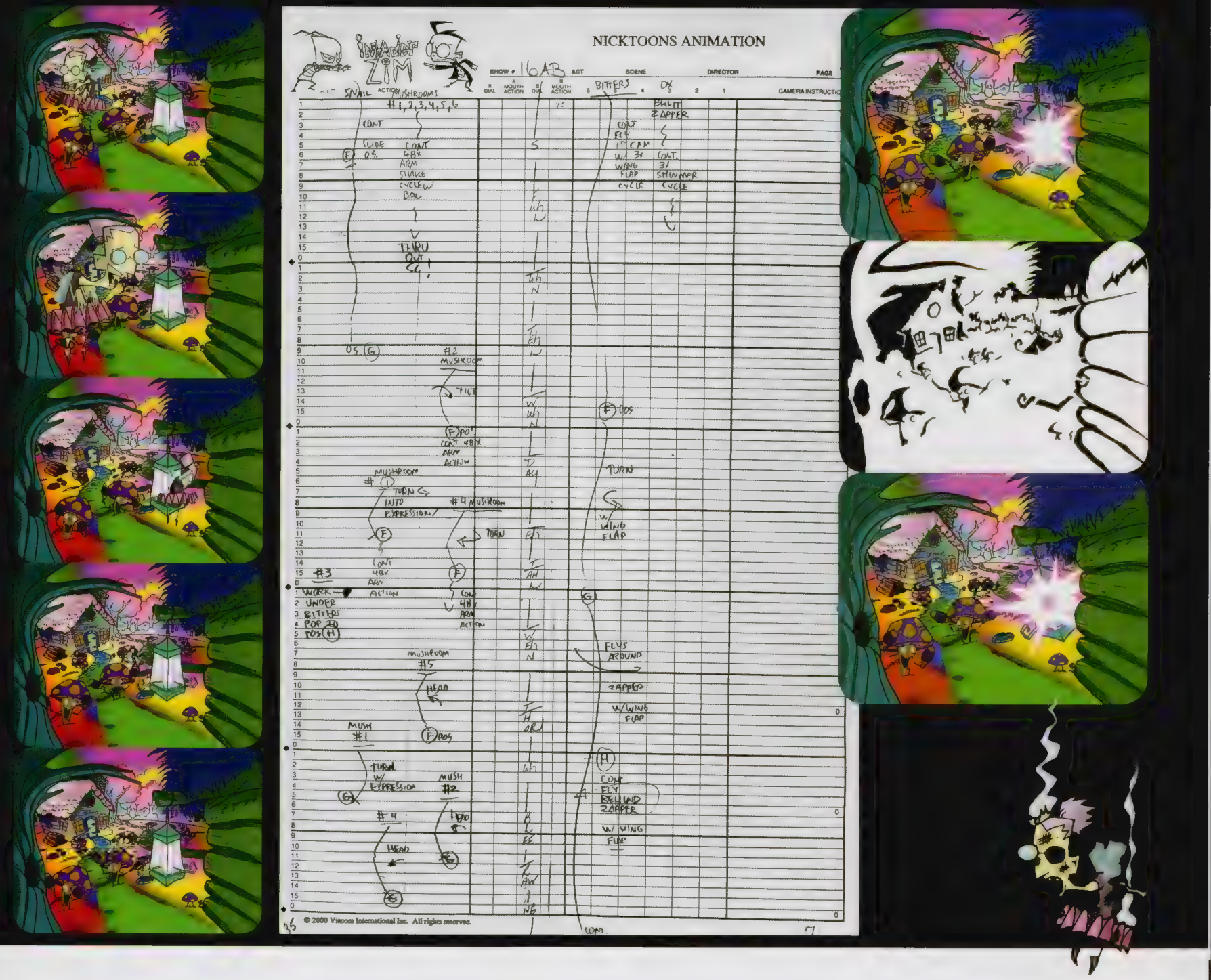
BACKGROUND DESIGN

This spread: Five backgrounds from "The Frycook What Came from All That Space" (EP26) and two from "Backseat Drivers from Beyond the Stars" (EP21).

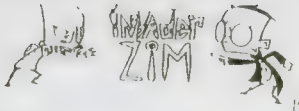


DIRECTION

This spread: The exposure sheets, sometimes called X-sheets or dope sheets, are a tool for directors to describe exactly how each animated movement should be timed on screen. Animators draw the action based on the timing established in these plans. Ms. Bitters saying "Everything

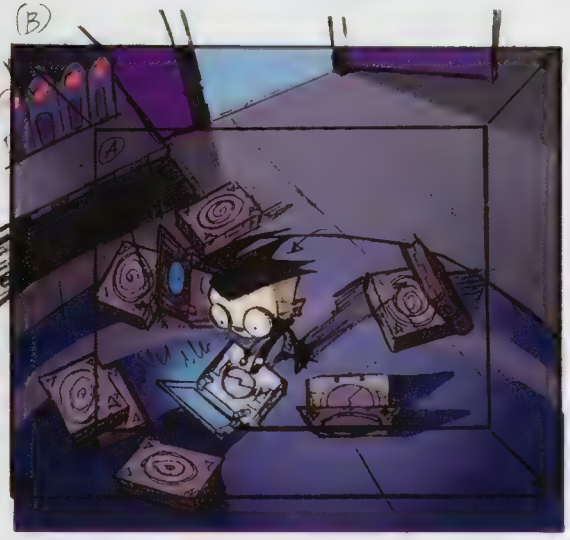


was so nice and peaceful until one day it all went horribly wrong" is broken into phonetic phrasing in the B Dial column. "Eh–vree–thee–ng–|wuhz|soh–|n–iee–s–|n–|pee–s–fuhl–|uhn–tehl–|wuhn–|day–|eh–t|ahl–|wehn–t|hor–uh–blee–|raw–ng" is used for lip sync animation when a character is speaking on screen. In this particular shot from "Halloween Spectacular of Spooky Doom" (EP14), Ms. Bitters is speaking in a voice-over while she describes the time that she was a fairy princess.



SC 16

(B)



SLOW TRUCK OUT

W/ CROSS 4º TO. DURING X-DISS

DX BKGD. SCREEN
DX GLOW CUBE UP
DX CAST SHADOW
PAINT W RIM SHADOW - DIB

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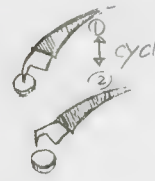
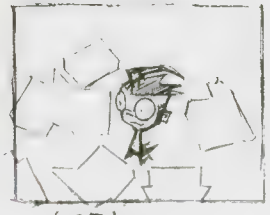
COLOR THIS PANEL

DIB PUSHING BUTTON

PROPS "RED MONITOR"



BG: "RED MONITOR"



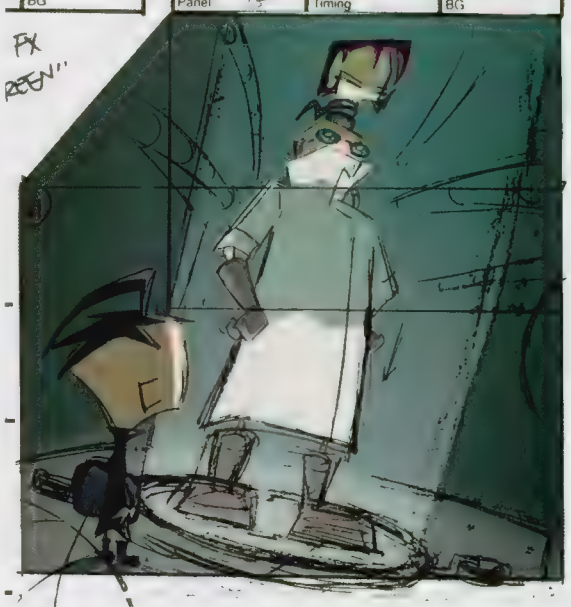
(SP) 6<

2º X-DISS.

Scene 14 cont

BG | Panel | Timing | BG

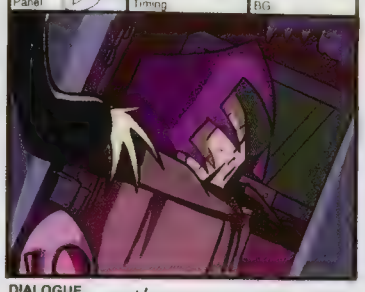
FX "REEN"



COMPUTER 2º DA.I

Scene 23 cont

Panel D | Timing | BG



DIALOGUE

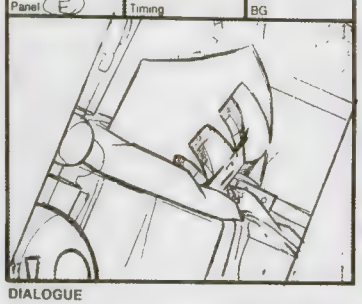
GAZ: "PURPLE" LIKE DIB IN "LIFE OF DOOM"

GAZ IS SLEEPING INSIDE

PAGE 37

Scene cont (CUT)

Panel E | Timing | BG



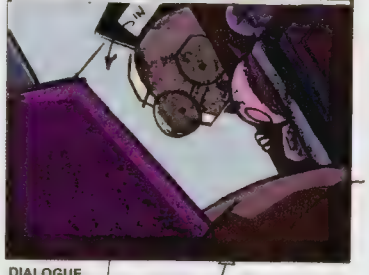
DIALOGUE

SC 24 (A)

125A GAZ PARK

Scene 24 cont

Panel B | Timing | BG



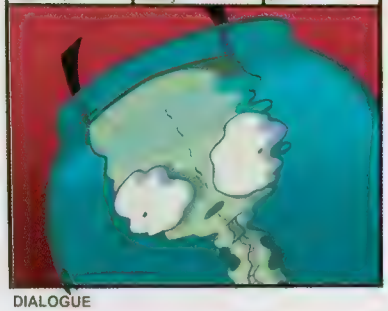
DIALOGUE

DIB PEEKS HEAD IN ..

GAZ

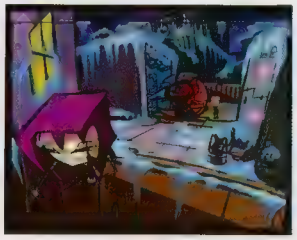
DIB: "XRIM"

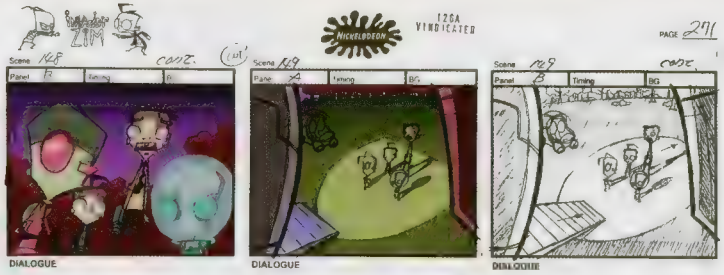
Panel A | Timing | BG

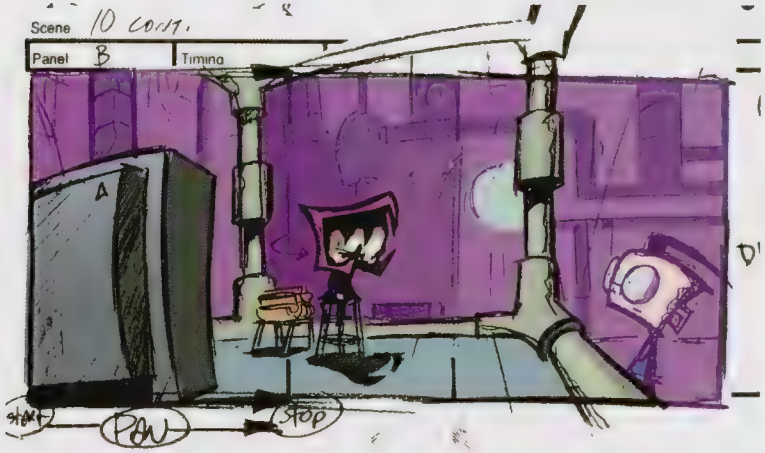


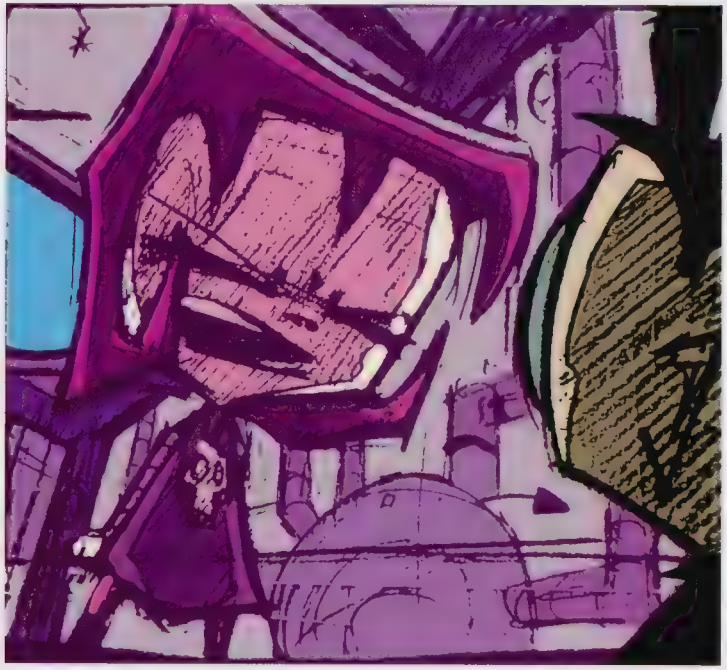
DIALOGUE

COLOR KEYS





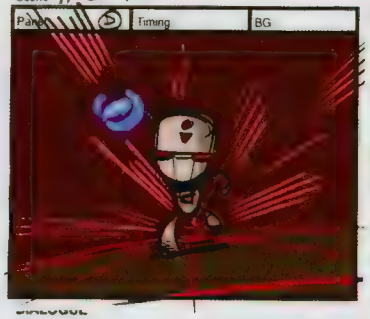




This spread: To achieve specific looks in the color design, some key moments in *Zim* storyboards were sketched over in digital color as a key for the animation production studio to reference. These moments often related to special, dramatic lighting conditions and effects.

Scene 91 CONT.

Panel (D) | Timing | BG



DIALOGUE

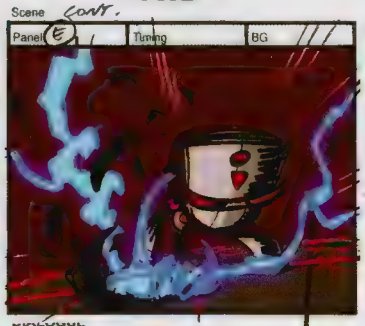
CYCLE (E→D→E→E) 2x's

CYCLE (D)(E)(F) 2 TIMES

4x

Scene CONT.

Panel (E) | Timing | BG



DIALOGUE

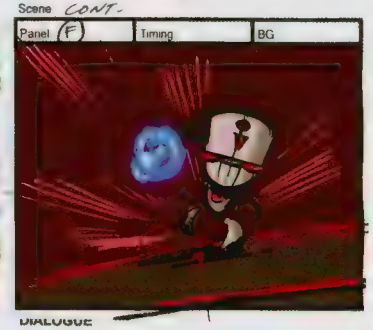
BLITE ELECTRICITY

*N/S CAM SHAKE ON HITS

- (MIMI) SLAMS HER LARGE HAND INTO THE GROUND
- LIGHTNING BOLTS SHOOT OUT

Scene CONT.

Panel (F) | Timing | BG



DIALOGUE

BLUE FX

- CONT

6x

(1) DIX GLOW EFX
(2) TIP HI-LITE/SHADOWS 8" of cam. shake

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*PANEL BORDERS ARE TV SAFE

1258 TORA SC 66

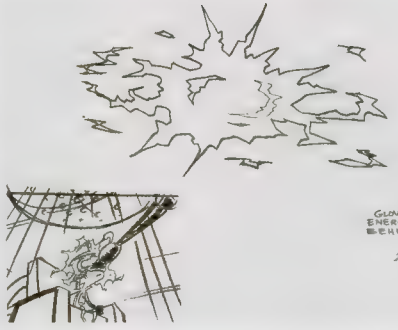
GAZ SWIRLING INTO BOOK W/ GLOWING SPARKLES (SPC)

1258_E004_L01

1248_E002 SC. 37

PLEASE REFER ALL OTHER ELECTRICITY EFFECTS TO THISE COLORS EFFECTS SHOULD BE BLUE

112 A (FX)
8 GOOP FROM SANDWICH
10 ZIM THROWS UP
14 SMOKE FROM ZIM'S HEAD (BOLOGNA ON HEAD)
15 SMOKE CONT
68 DOG DROOL
82 SARA STEAMS (SMOKE DX) AND FAINTS
84 DIB LICKING (SLURPS)
90 KID SMOKING (STEAM FROM HEAD)
99 SCRUBBING BUBBLES (SINK)
100 LONG SHOT OF SAME
112 ENERGY RAYS
182 - VIALS EXPLODE
183 - CHARRED SMOKING DIB + ZIM
192 VIAL OF LIQUID



KEY: 1248_E002 SC. 33

(A) BRIGHT BACK LIT JAGGED OUTLINE, LEVEL BELOW CHARACTER

(B) CHARACTER LEVEL

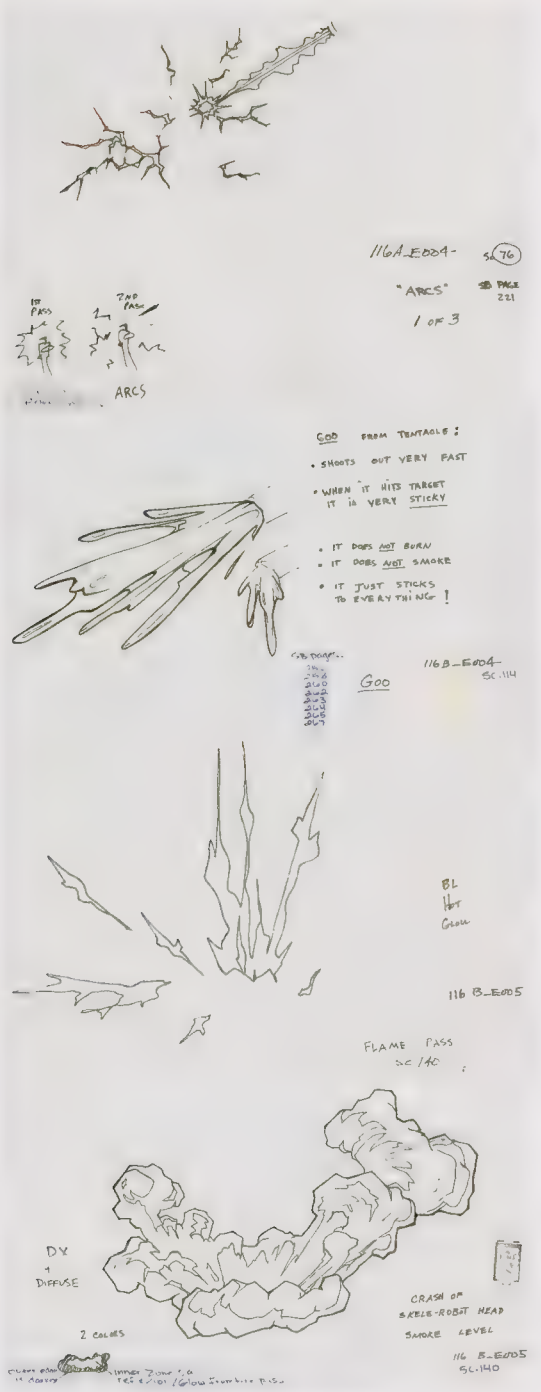
(C) SHADOW (CORE, OR RIM-LIT) ANIMATES W/ ELECTRICITY

(D) DX GLOW ELECTRICITY, 75-55% OPACITY, LEVEL ON TOP OF ENTIRE CHARACTER AND OTHER ELEMENTS

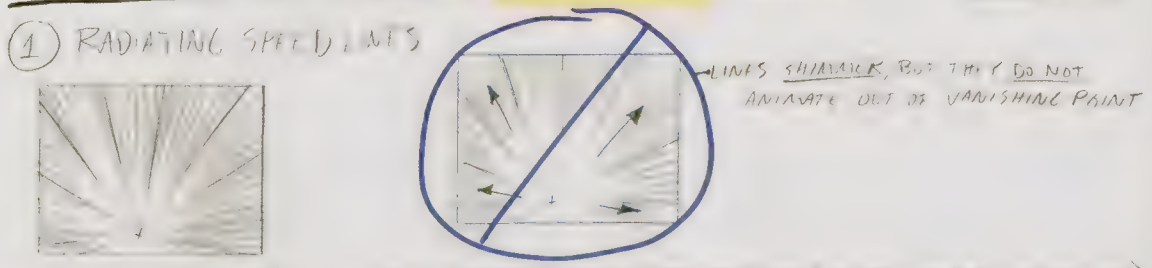
1248 "DIBSHIP" SCENES 33-39

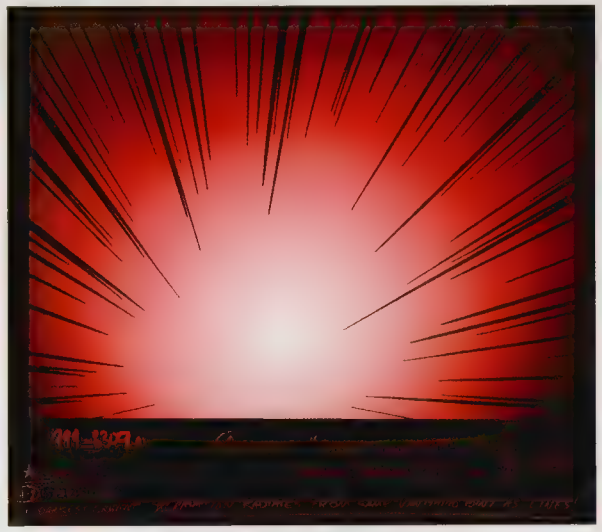
ENGULFING ELECTRICITY EFFECTS GUIDE

3 OR 5 DRAWING RANDOM ORDER CYCLE ON 1's OR 2's (ALTERNATE WAVING CYCLE)



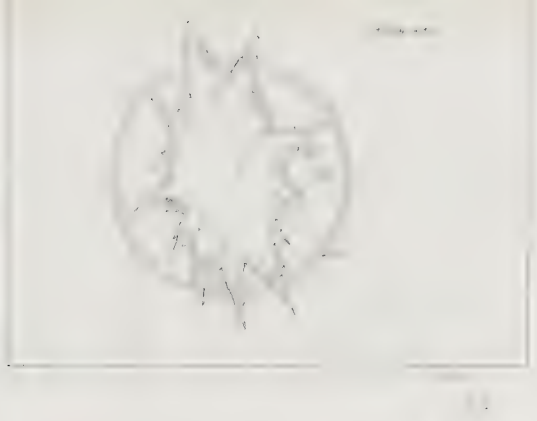
STOCK SPEED LINE REFERENCE PACK





Unexpected: Effects animation is carefully planned as part of the overall art direction of a series. Electric bursts, explosions, magic, fire, and all sorts of gaseous clouds and viscous fluids need to be planned and described for the animation studio to implement. On the far left opposite, a list from a breakdown meeting identifies all of the effects animation that will be needed in the episode "Bolognius Maximus" (EP12A). Included above are specific goo-from-tentacle and speed line instructions.

121A_E001



121A_E001

121A_E001

121A_E001

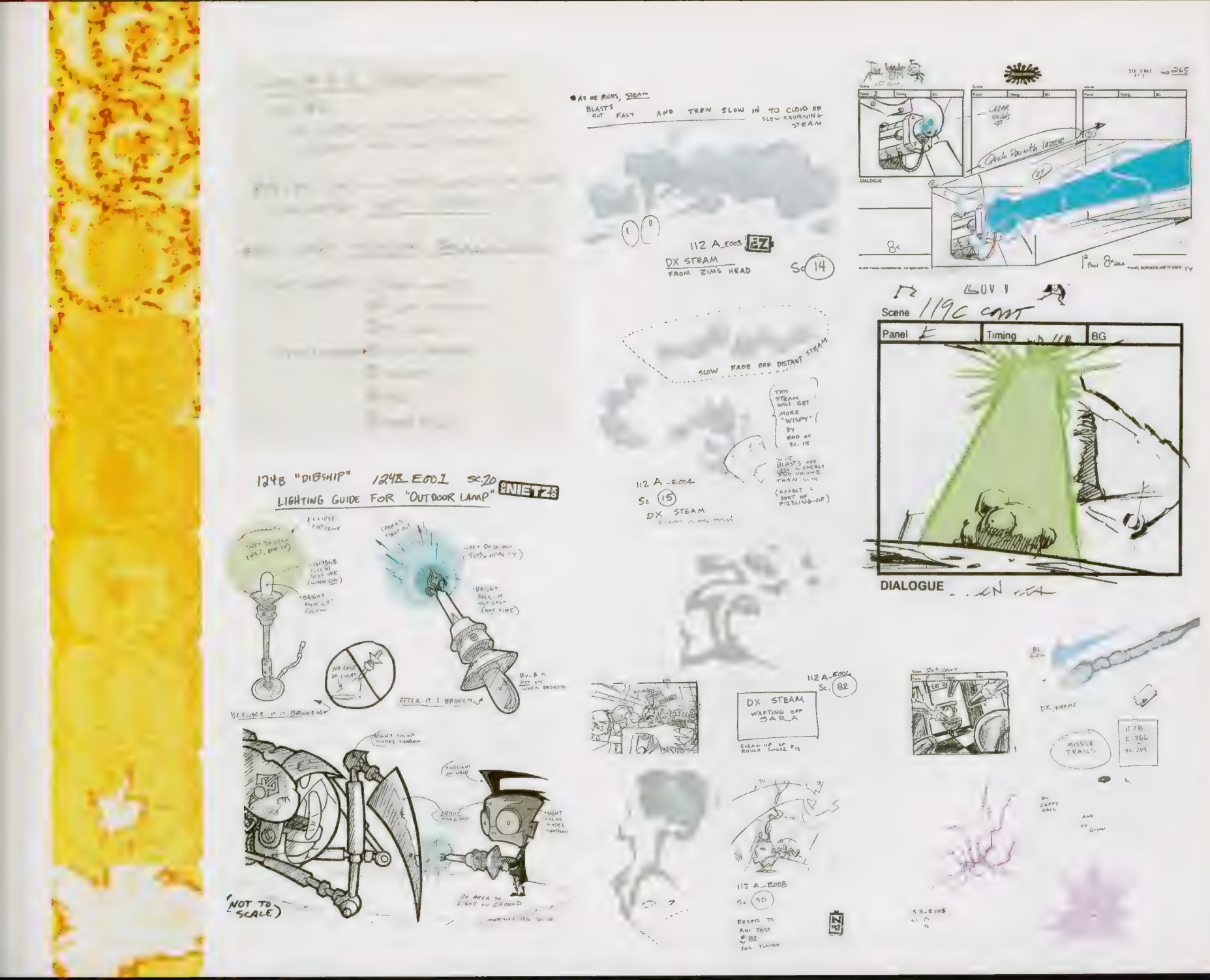
121A_E001

121A_E001

121A_E001

121A_E001

121A_E001



Opposite: A series of 2-D effects layout drawings from the episode "Backseat Drivers from Beyond the Stars" (EP21), and notes above detailing the intended colors of its components. The final colors in the episode (see stills above left) did not reflect the red and darker red from the original plan.

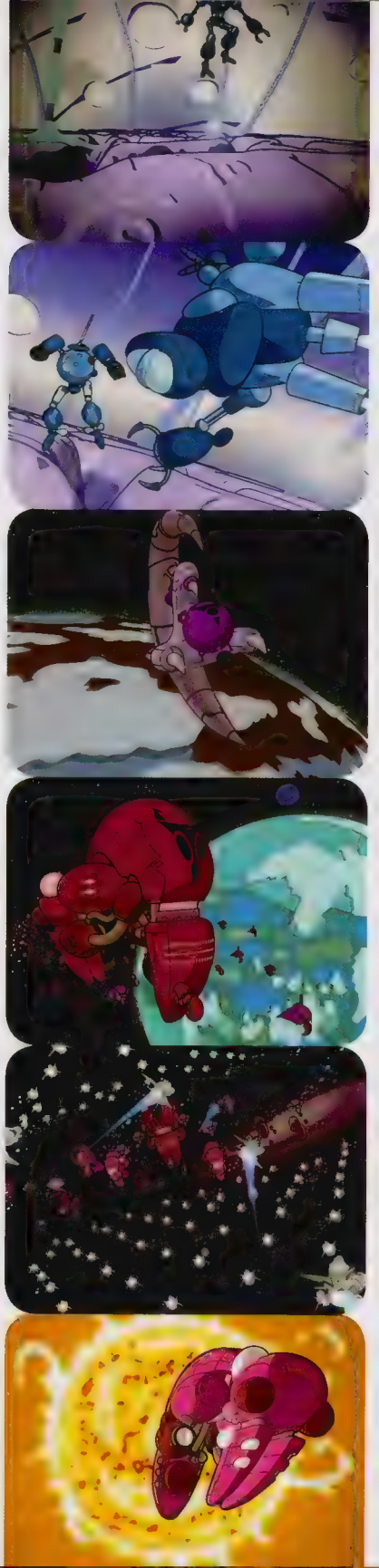
Above: A variety of additional effects designs.

PROPS

Many of the ships and scene elements in outer space were modeled and animated in 3-D in what was a relatively new process for Nickelodeon at the time of the *Zim* production. Other elements including the ubiquitous telescoping tubes of Irken technology were also often animated in 3-D and "toon shaded" to achieve and blend with the flat color look of traditional cartoon animation. It was another extension of the enthusiasm and ambition behind the series, and a complicating factor in the production schedule and budget.

Ian Graham [storyboard artist]: We kind of did it in reverse and this may have had something to do with the unsustainable budget. We weren't given a limit or any specific guidance on the 3-D, just that we had some 3-D that we could play with and could do some 3-D shots. We had an internal 3-D team which is really rare, John Sore and Hanzhi Tang, (these guys have all moved on to ILM and WETA and that kind of stuff), really talented guys, and they just tried to make it work. We were allowed to communicate with them, which was also rare as storyboard artists. Usually these areas are separate and the supervisors oversee it all. But on *Zim*, they would come to us, or we would go to them, chitchat, and go "ooh it would be cool if we did this," because they were as excited as we were. We knew the limitations of what we could or couldn't do, but we didn't have an amount that we were limited to using. It wasn't like we were told "you have fifteen shots, that's it, so use them smart." So we would just get into a sequence and be like "oh yeah this is going to be all CG stuff!" It was a lot of fun but it probably pushed the budget up a lot. Steve Ressel and Jhonen had a lot to do with it too, they were in there every day just as excited and looking at what the CG guys were doing.

P0001A-VIRAL TANK.



This spread: Some designs that were translated into 3-D, and stills that include work from the CG team. Bryan Konietzko: "I always loved the Irken tech aesthetic, which looked very organic and insectoid, but also sort of bloopy. I remember Jhonen would often design things in profile, especially space ships. I thought John Sore and the CG team did a great job translating those into 3-D, achieving that cool/goofy balance."

INVADER ZIM

PROP

126a

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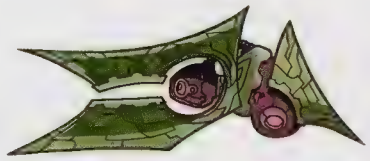
ALIEN SHIP 1 OF 3

SC # 146
serial # 126A_P026

REVISED 2/8/02 CLEAN UP

3/4 FRONT

PROFILE



P008 TAK'S SHIP

INVADER ZIM

PROP

126a

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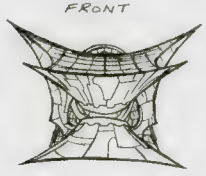
ALIEN SHIP 2 OF 3
ROUGH TURN

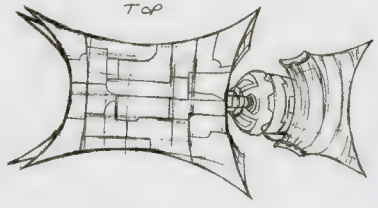
SC # 146
serial # 126A_P026

FRONT

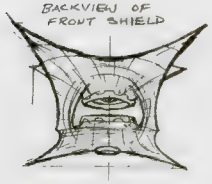
BACK

TOP



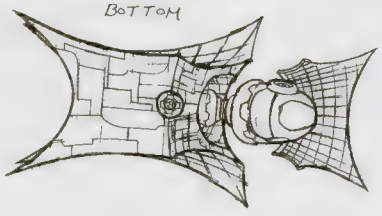


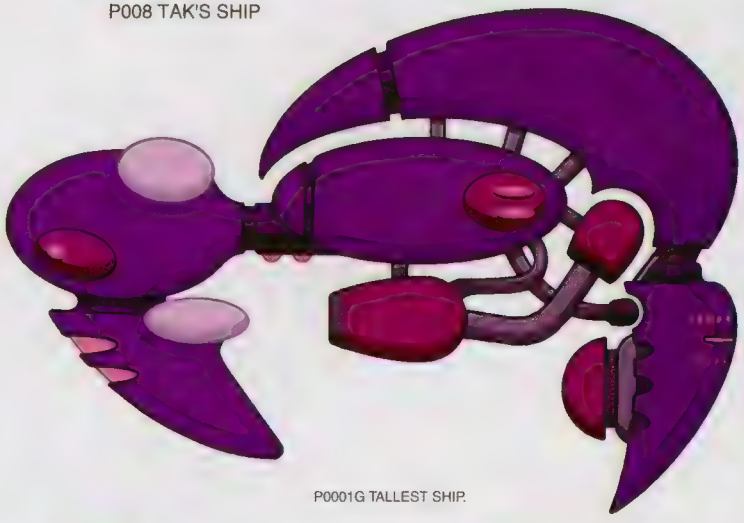
BACKVIEW OF FRONT SHIELD



* NOTE – GRID LINES ARE FOR SHAPE REFERENCE. REFER TO CLEAN UP FOR DETAIL

BOTTOM





P0001G TALLEST SHIP.

INVADER ZIM

PROP

126a

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ALIEN SHIP

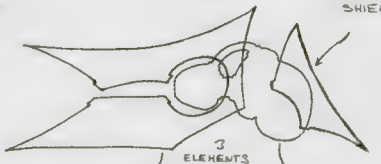
SC # 146
serial # 126A_P026

3 OF 3

THE FRAMING ELEMENTS ON SHIP HAVE A THICKNESS

SLANTED

REAR SHIELD



3 ELEMENTS FLOAT SEPERATELY IN A FIXED POSITION

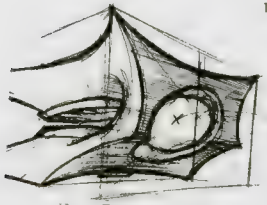
FRONT SHIELD

FUSELAGE

PANELLING ON OUTER SHELL

GRID ON INNER SHELL

REAR SHIELD IS A THIN CURVED PIECE OF METAL



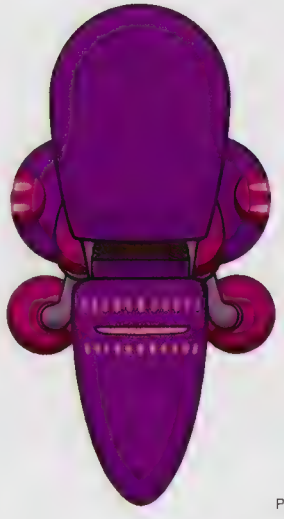
REAR 3/4 OF FRONT SHIELD

COCKPIT OF FUSELAGE IS SUSPENDED WITHIN THE CAVITY OF FRONT SHIELD

FRONT FUSILAGE

PROFILE FUSILAGE

BACKVIEW FUSILAGE



P0001G TALLEST SHIP

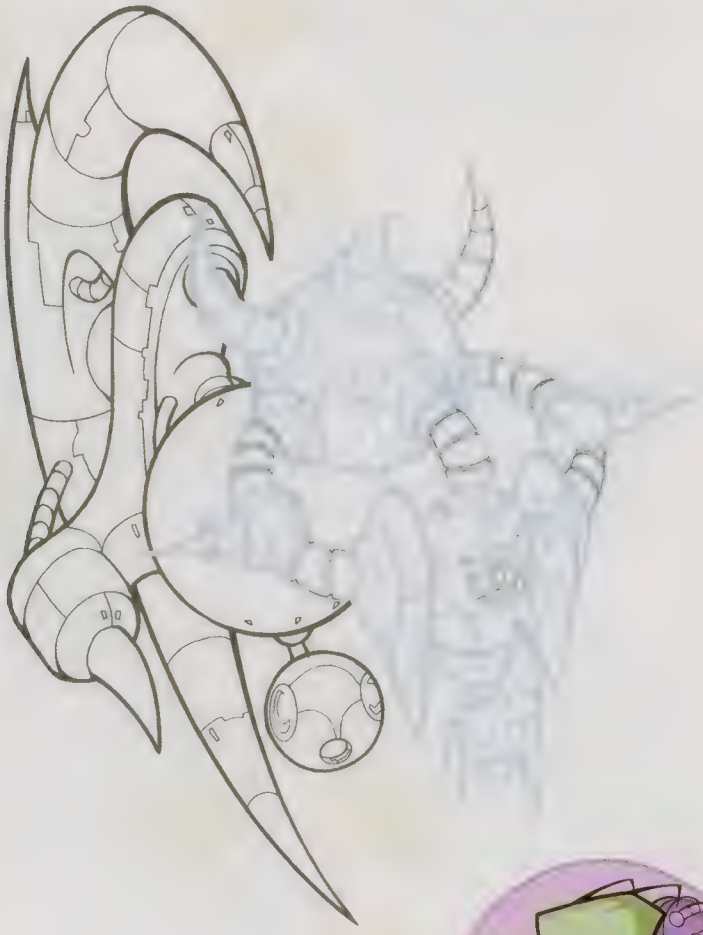
INVADER ZIM	TITLE	ACT	SC#	DATE	ARTIST
EPISODE# 128 AB	THE TRIAL			10·26·01	WONG

ORBITAL LASER ERAY

DESCRIPTION:

NIETZ

PROP MODEL



INVADER ZIM	TITLE	ACT	SC#	DATE	ARTIST
EPISODE# 128AB	THE TRIAL			10/30/01	EB

SECURITY DROID

DESCRIPTION:

128 —

NIETZ

PROP MODEL

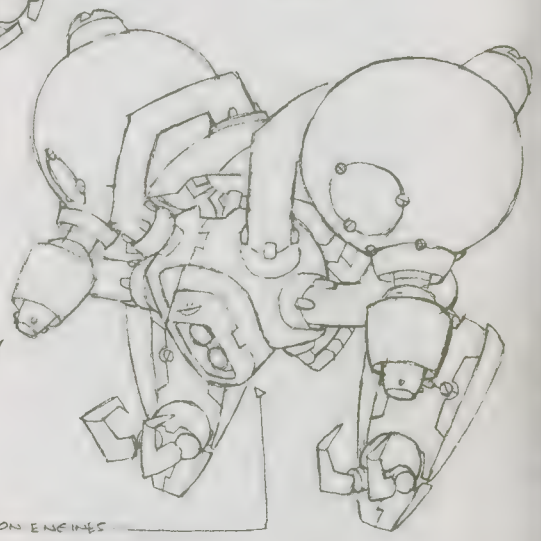
PG 9

(CHECK BOARD FOR SCALE REF.)

FRONT

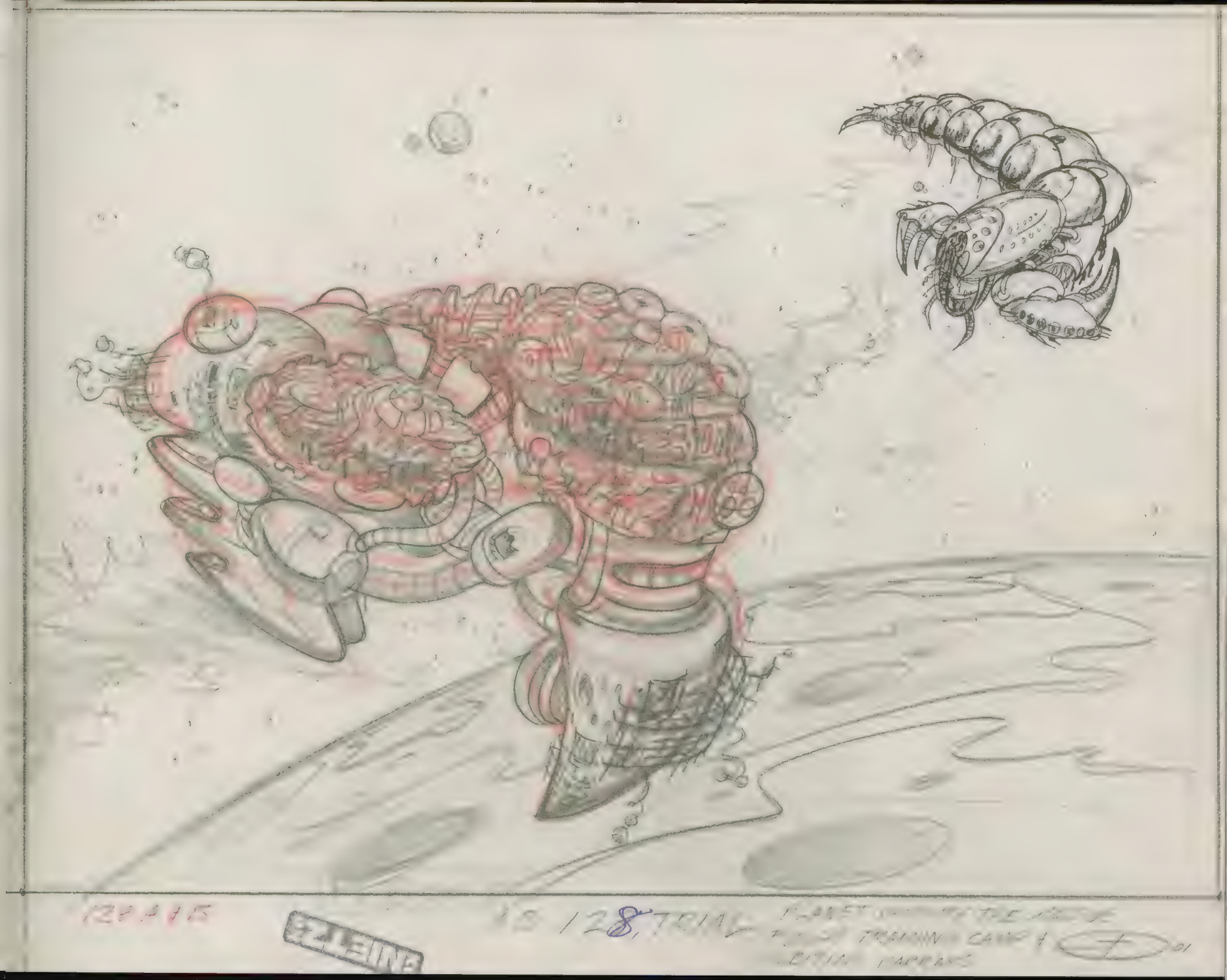
FINGERS FLOAT

REAR



LEVITATION ENGINE HAS DX GLOW

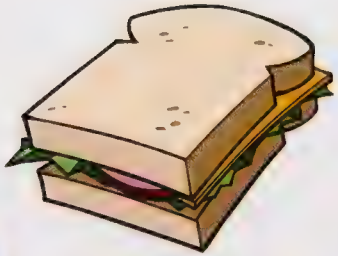
DX GLOW ON ENGINES



This spread: Designs from the unfinished episode "The Trial." Opposite are prop designs by Jeff Wong and Eric Lloyd Brown. Above is a layout design by Spencer G. Davis.

P025 MILK CARTON.

P032 SPACE BURGER.

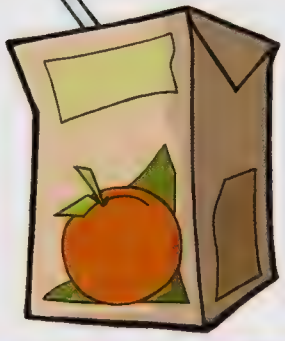


P001 CAN OF EXPLODEY BEANS.

P024 BOLOGNA .

P002 TURKEY.

P021 POOP BBQ SAUCE.



P0118 ICE CREAM TRUCK (BACK)

P0043 BUS (FRONT)

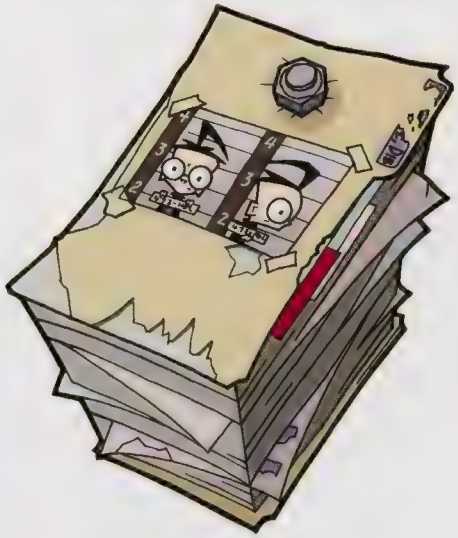
INVADER ZIM | 126A | VINDICATED | 89 | 2-01-02 | BB

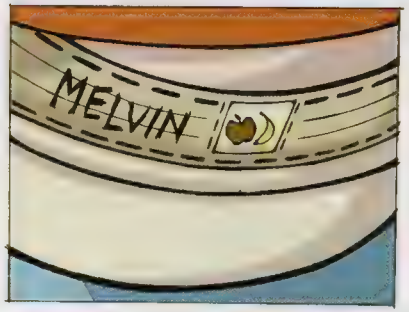
PILES OF TRASH

126A - P016 | NIETZ | PROP MODEL

P032 ANIMATRONIC CHEERLEADER.

HUGE FILE MARKED "DIB"





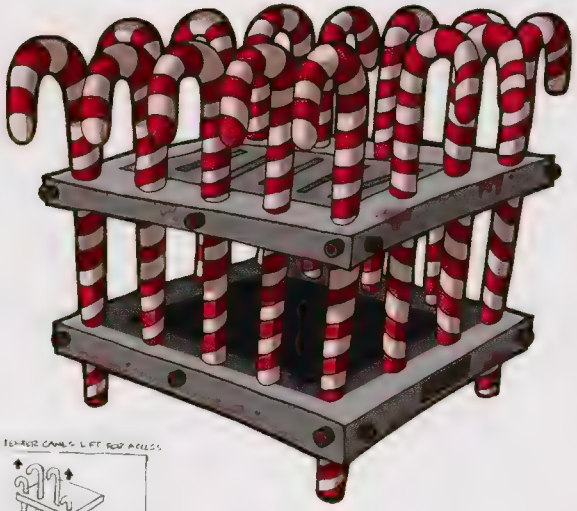
S003 MELVIN'S UNDERGARMENTATION.

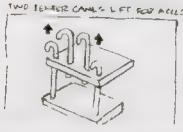
PIG SIGN

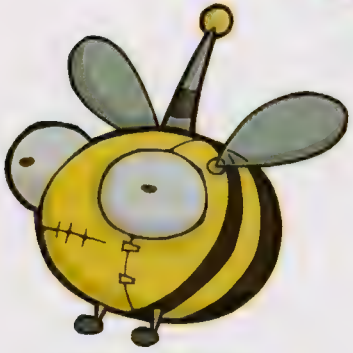
NORMAL

WHEN SQUEEZED

CANDY CANE CAGE

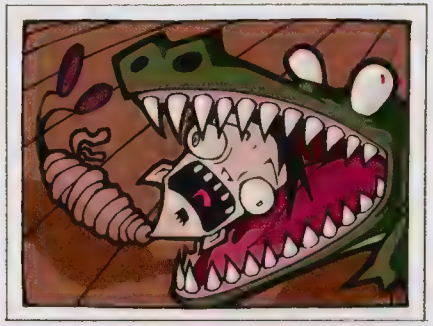




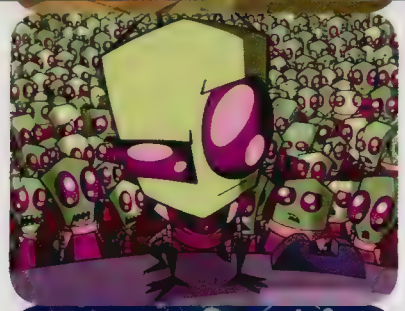


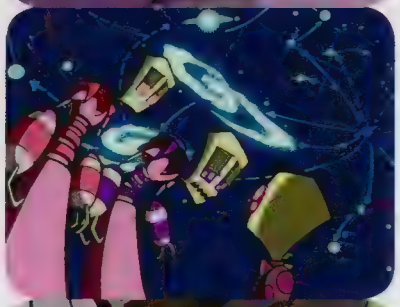
P002 ROBO BEE.

PICTURE OF DWICKY AND ALLIGATOR



This spread: Props are generally anything that a character picks up, moves, or interacts with, or are a moving part of the background artwork that must be animated. Prop designs are inked and painted to create color models like those above that are sent to the animation production studio for reference.





EP1 (101) "The Nightmare Begins"

In which the Almighty Tallest emcee the great assigning of planets to the Operation Impending Doom 2 invaders, and Zim barges in uninvited. Assigned to Earth, Zim establishes himself among the Earthlings. His Skool classmate Dib is on to him, and vows to uncover his plot and secret identity.

Almighty Tallest Red: Zim . . . you're alive?

Zim: Yes! So very alive. And full of goo. *Mission goo.* Don't be surprised if I take care of the humans before the Armada even gets here.

EP2A (102A) "Bestest Friend"

Zim realizes he needs a friend to fit in at Skool so as to deflect suspicion. Zim begins the selection process among the social misfits in the cafeteria.

Zim: We begin by testing your absorbency.

The third friend test involves a beaver and toy taxi, and is performed offscreen to the sounds of hellish screams, crunching, chomping, and buzzing. Keef, relatively unscathed, accepts Zim's friendship. Later, after no longer requiring his friendship services, but unable to shake his offers of waffles, parties, and other horrible, horrible things, Zim replaces Keef's eyeballs with cybernetic mind-controlling orbs to trick Keef into following a squirrel that he believes to be Zim. The episode ends starkly with Keef chasing the squirrel off of a three-story building, landing somewhere offscreen with a cinematic explosion and the plaintive question, "You don't like waffles?"

EP2B (104B) "NanoZim"

When Gir leaves the door and windows open, Dib breaks into Zim's house dressed as a ninja and escapes with photographic evidence of Zim without his human disguise on.

Dib: Soon your Zim-guts will be strewn all over an autopsy table. Hahaha!

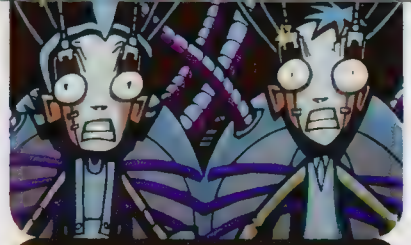
Later, Dib begins to lose control over his limbs and realizes that Zim is in a microscopic submersible inside of his body.

Zim: Now I'm in your trachea, Dib. Your brain is so close, I can smell it.

Zim manages to force Dib's limbs to destroy the evidence. After an intense microbot battle inside Dib as waged among Zim, Dib, and Gaz, Zim's craft is disabled.

Dib: Now, for my finishing move!

Stomach rumbling, Dib enters the bathroom. With a single flush, Zim swirls away screaming. The End.



EP3A (103A) "Parent-Teacher Night"

Dib taunts Zim about his predicament of having to come to parent-teacher night with no parents.

Zim: Yes, oh, I will bring my parents. And they shall be the greatest, most parental parents ever!

Zim tries to make the the Roboparent decoys learn human social behavior in a *Clockwork Orange*–style reprogramming session using a wall of monitors. After Zim leaves, Gir gets bored and changes the television channels, which infect the decoys with commercials and kung fu films. Chaos ensues but Zim gets through parent-teacher night without revealing his true identity.

EP3B (103B) "Walk of Doom"

Zim develops a new location tracking chip for Gir, and to test it, they lose themselves in the city. Zim wears his new "insidiously clever" disguise, an old man costume.

Zim: Be alert, Gir. On this planet we are surrounded by danger . . . and MADNESS!

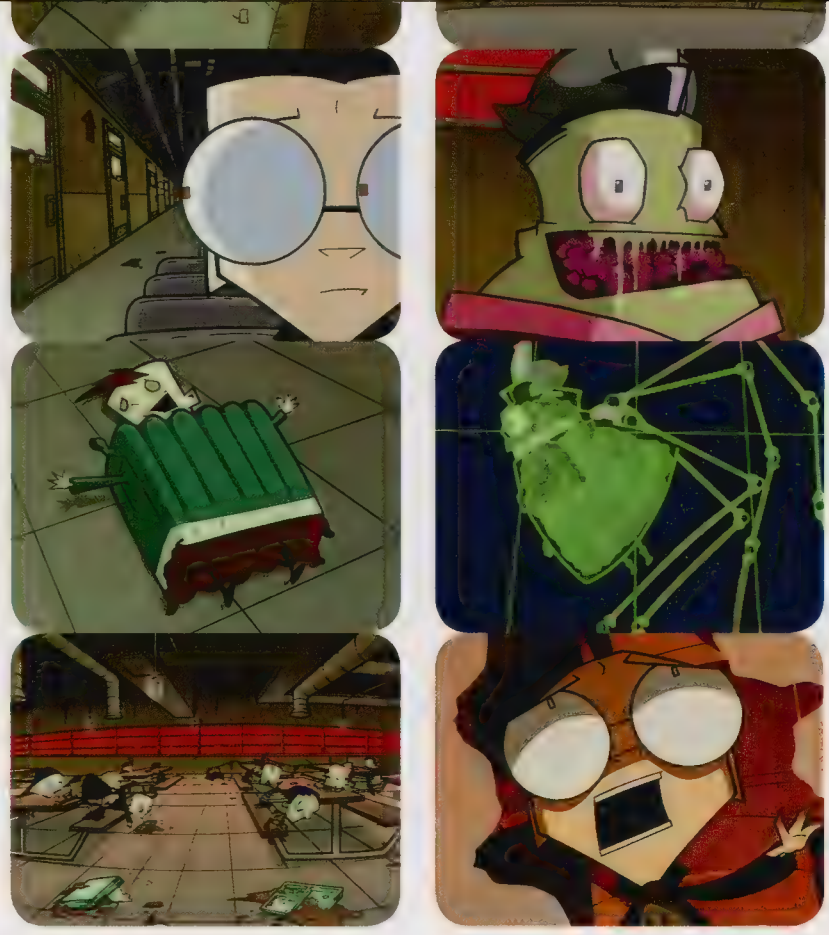
Gir, however, has replaced the location chip with a cupcake, and most of the fuel that allows him to fly with tuna-fish salad. After many misadventures, Zim and Dib never make it home.

EP4A (104A) "Germs"

After watching a movie in which the Earth-conquering alien race is felled by human germs, Zim laughs indignantly, then has multiple panic attacks as the micro-goggles that he orders from Planet Callnowia reveal germs covering every surface. Zim disinfects everything in a frenzy. Gir comes home with his filthy pig friend and rolls all over everything. While out on a trip to buy more disinfectant, Gir sees MacMeaties restaurant and Zim chases him inside. Everything is as germ-encrusted inside as elsewhere except for the burgers, which are germ-free.

Zim: You! Burgerlord. How is it that this meat is so pure? So *perfect*?

It turns out that the restaurant's meat is Space Meat, made of napkins. The Space Meat inspires Zim's plan. Zim returns to school, making his grand entrance covered in space meat.



EP4B (102B) "Dark Harvest"

In Skool, Zim contracts head-pigeons (a pigeon lands on his head) and is sent to the nurse by Ms. Bitters. Dib is delighted, confident that Zim will be exposed as an alien when the nurse discovers no human organs inside of him. Zim is also confident, however, and once in the hallways, he begins his dark harvest, using a device to steal human organs from the school populace by swapping them with other non-organ objects, such as a cat, a remote control, or a can of poop. Even Gaz is not spared, though she continues to play her Game Slave while it is buried somewhere inside her. Dib confronts a now-engorged-with-human-organs Zim.

Dib: You're a hideous blob of stolen organs!

Zim: I've been working out. GACK! [He vomits a spool of large intestine and slurps it up again like linguini.]

After an epic horror sequence of unrelenting drama and suspense, the episode ends in the nurse's office, with Zim all cleared as healthy and human, and Dib singled out as a hideous mooing cyborg boy (Zim having replaced one of his organs with a moo-making toy).

EP5A (105A) "Attack of the Saucer Morons"

Testing the defensive capabilities of human law enforcement, Zim causes a police car to careen off the highway overpass into a giant wiener restaurant, and then his own ship crashes into a park because of a chance collision with a single bee. Zim requests towing help from Gir, but can't get through because Gir is dancing at an all-night rave. After returning the following day to retrieve the ship himself, Zim discovers to his horror that attendees at an alien convention have found it first. When they discover Zim is an alien after his disguise falls off, Zim fears he will be dissected.

Zim: Don't come any closer! Don't try anything on me or I'll . . . I'll . . . I'll lay eggs in your stomach! I mean it!

The alien convention attendees instead worship him, idolize him, and request him to bless the corns on their toes. Finally escaping, Zim and Gir crash into another bee, and then land in another alien convention.

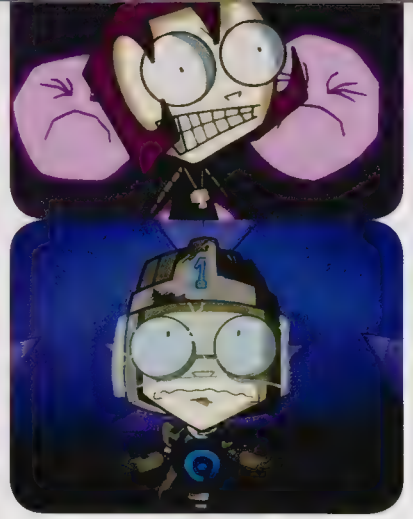
EP5B (105B) "The Wettening"

Dib notices that water causes Zim incredible discomfort when it is raining and vows to torment and harass him on Monday. Zim, noticing that the paste on his hand creates a water barrier, counter-vows to thwart Dib and seek revenge. Dib arrives at school with a water balloon–launching weapon, ready to attack Zim. But Zim is in space, having created a giant space water balloon filled with most of the water on Earth. Zim drops the balloon and destroys Skool, the entire city, and probably everything.

Zim: Gir, I'll be in my lab, bathing in paste. Don't disturb me.

EP6A (106A) "Career Day"

At Skool's career day, the children take a test to determine their future occupations. A machine, the POS 2000, drops from the ceiling and analyzes the results. The children are assigned to spend the day with an adult mentor in their field. Zim is assigned to work in fast food preparation at Mc-Meaties (not Mac-Meaties this time), and Dib is paired with a paranormal investigator, Bill, who is obsessed with subjects that Dib knows to be hoaxes, or just silly. Dib learns that Zim is about to undergo a hideous molting while on the job, but is unable to get the paranormal investigator to witness it in time. Zim gets fired.

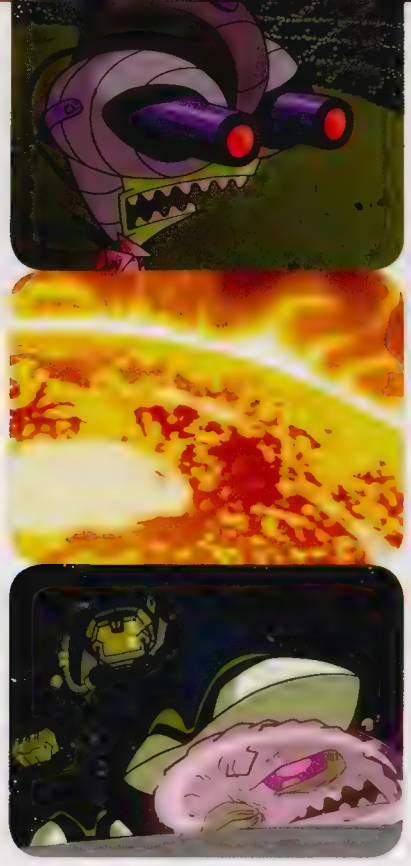


EP6B (106B) "Battle-Dib"

In one of the Zim-less episodes, Dib is preparing to present everything he knows to the Swollen Eyeball secret society of paranormal investigators, but first must get a permission slip signed by his father. Attempting to get access to Professor Membrane at his studio, Dib is rejected by security. Dib's only option is to try to become an audience member at his father's show by passing a written test and a series of battle-dome feats. After losing and being escorted out, Dib creates a diversion and escapes into his father's dressing room where he begs for Professor Membrane's signature on his permission slip for the sake of all mankind.

Professor Membrane: Now, now! I don't sign autographs backstage, little boy.

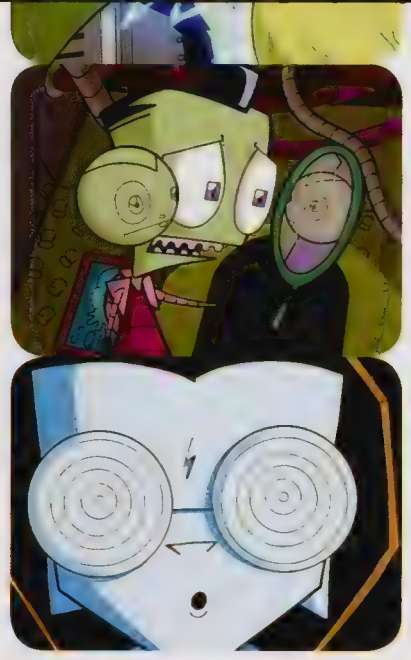
Kicked into the alley, Dib is defeated. However, security tosses out the signed permission slip after all, and Dib is jubilant. At his presentation, however, he realizes that he has forgotten his case with evidence in the alley.



EP7A (107A) "Planet Jackers"

The Planet Jackers from another alien race have encased the Earth in a giant shell enclosure with inward-facing screens to simulate the sky. The Jackers begin to haul the Earth and its moon away to burn in their dying home world's sun like a load of firewood. Zim and Gir thwart their plan, but in the process the moon breaks out of its own containment pod, crashing into the Earth and bouncing off as the Earth hurtles into the deep black space of a foreign star system.

Zim: The Earth is safe! I did it, Gir! Now let's go destroy it.

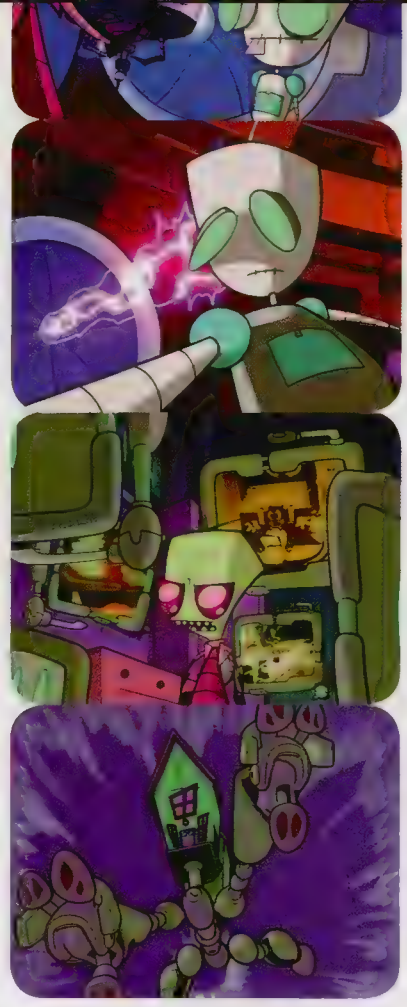


EP7B (108A) "Rise of the Zitboy"

Dib is aware of a weakness in Zim's secret base but won't tell him what it is. Gir has pizza delivered, and then rubs pizza grease all over Zim's face, which develops a zit. It grows to an outrageous size, with a semi-transparent skin and sloshing liquid visible inside. Zim is stricken.

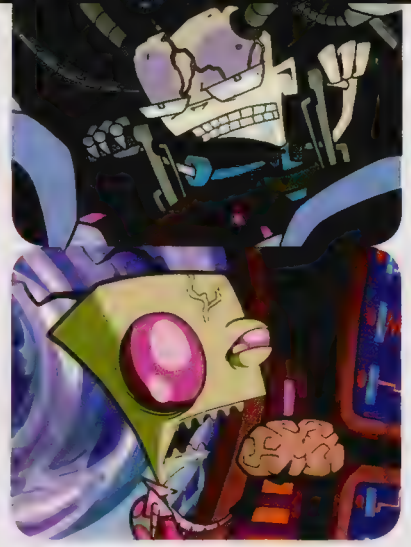
Zim: How can I study this planet if the entire population is staring at my freakishly deformed head?!

Gir draws a face on the zit, and suddenly hypnotized by the sloshing zit's visage, goes into a subservient trance. Zim quickly realizes that his zit has mind-controlling powers, dresses the zit up with a doll body, and names it Pustulio. At Skool, Zim hypnotizes the children, then forces Dib to reveal the secret weakness that he has found. Zim's zit pops, gushing pus like a firehose. Dib has to clean up the mess.



EP8A (108B) "Invasion of the Idiot Dog Brain"

Zim has to replace the artificial intelligence brain that controls the entire secret base in order to fix the security system. Gir's head encroaches on the energy beam as the brain transference is engaged and becomes the sentient mind of the entire house's computer. Deciding to get tacos, the Gir-house grows legs and rampages through the city to a restaurant, only to realize it doesn't have a mouth.



EP8B (107B) "Bad, Bad Rubber Piggy"

Professor Membrane, demonstrating the evils of space-time displacement on *Probing the Membrane of Science*: So, despite the temptation, altering the timeline is more foolish than productive. Anybody who would build a space-time object replacement device is a complete MORON!

Zim: Gir! The space-time object replacement device is ready!

Zim replaces objects from Dib's past with rubber piggies at inopportune moments, causing lasting bodily harm to Dib until he dies. An unforeseen result is that Professor Membrane creates the fusion-powered titanium exoskeleton Mega Boy 3000, which revives Dib with the strength of ten thousand little boys. Dib seeks revenge by attacking Zim's house. Zim sends one more piggie back in time with a note for himself to not mess with time after all, but it replaces his brain in the present, rendering him a drooling idiot.

EP9A (109A) "A Room with a Moose"

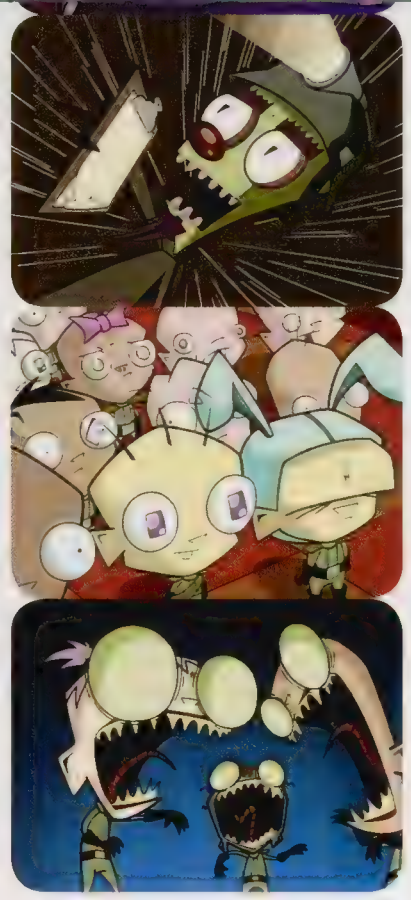
In Skool, Dib complains to Ms. Bitters that Zim has taken more than three hours in the bathroom. Zim returns triumphantly declaring that his business is done (and he had a lot of it to do). A mysterious new school announcer (Gir) comes over the PA system to tell everyone in the class (except for Zim) to report for a mandatory school trip. Zim and Gir teleport home to commence phase two of the plan. "Leave no evidence!" Zim yells as the toilet stall explodes. Zim launches Dib and the rest of the class into space on a fake school bus, with satisfaction, into a wormhole. This wormhole was specially researched and selected by Zim after passing on a dimension of pure itchiness and another of pure dookie, to lead to a room with a moose in it. Dib uses his socially radioactive status to move the entire school bus full of children to the opposite side, tilting their bus safely back to Earth.

EP9B (109B) "Hamstergeddon"

Ms. Bitters's class is issued a classroom pet, Peepi the hamster. Zim witnesses how humans think it is cute, and reasons that that makes them weak. He plans to grow the hamster to an enormous size and use it to conquer the humans.

> **Dib:** Ms. Bitters, have you noticed anything strange about the hamster? He's three times the size and he has that hideous throbbing alien device on his back.

Inevitably the hamster grows into Ultra Peepi and begins to destroy the city. Zim and Dib are forced to fight together, against the giant hamster.

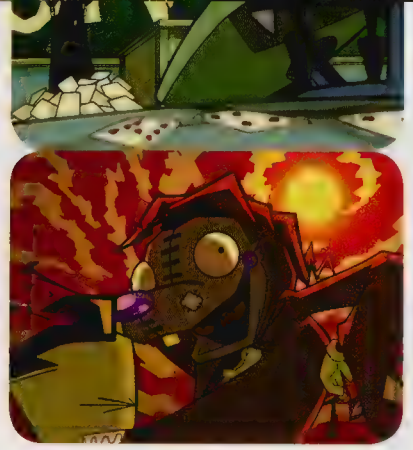


EP10A (110A) "Plague of Babies"

While landing the Voot Cruiser on the roof, Zim and Gir are seen out of their disguises by a person in the window next door, which turns out to be a baby. Zim goes next door as "the neighborhood baby inspector" to interrogate the baby, but is repelled by the smell. Later, when confronted by a gang of babies in his own house, Zim learns that the babies are aliens who have come to steal Zim's ship. In battle, the babies form a mega-baby, but Zim defeats them with an amplifier that makes them all stupid, like real babies.

EP10B (110B) "Bloaty's Pizza Hog"

It's the Membrane family's annual night out and Gaz's turn to choose the restaurant. She chooses Bloaty's Pizza Hog, but Dib gets captured by Zim after breaking into his secret base, and Professor Membrane doesn't have a "family night" opening for another year. Gaz, trying to locate Dib so that they can eat, finds him with Gir's help by teleporting to the spaceship orbiting Earth, where Zim is about to experiment on Dib. Considering whether or not the Membranes could still go out to eat if Dib's organs were on the outside of his body, Gaz realizes that she needs to rescue him before that happens. Crash-landing an escape ship directly into Bloaty's just in time for dinner, the family has their meal, and Zim, coming in to attack, is scared away by the horrific animatronic creatures of Bloaty's.



EP11A (111A) "Door to Door"

Due to budget cuts, the children of Skool are mostly using trash for desks. Ms. Bitters puts on a Poop Cola Dawg video detailing a fundraising scheme with Poop Cola candy sales, with prizes for top-performing students. The prizes are uniformly terrible or unattainable, but the top prize is so magnificent, that it is secret. This drives Zim into a rage of desperate desire. Dib notes Zim's interest and vows to beat him, just to watch him fail. The schoolchildren descend on a neighborhood like fundraising zombies to sell their candy. After setbacks, Zim decides to ditch the ineffective human-child–style sales approach. Zim invades the home of an obese couch-bound couple and children, demanding that they purchase his candy. He forces them to wear VR helmets to experience horrific visions of their future.

> **Zim:** Now see a world in which you do not buy my delicious treats! All that you love lies in ruins.

After winning the secret top prize, Zim learns that there wasn't one, and instead receives a consolation can of tuna.

EP11B (111B) "FBI Warning of Doom"

Gir is watching a DVD for the hundredth-plus time, and Zim happens to see the FBI WARNING screen. Zim asks his computer what the FBI is and it gives an educated guess. "Founded in 1492, by, uh, demons, the FBI is a crack law enforcement agency with a mission to, I don't know, uh, fight aliens?" Zim, terrified of the government spy device, vows to return it immediately and breaks into the mall where the Video Outhouse is. Late-night security guard Sergeant Slab awaits. Zim barrels toward the video deposit slot avoiding laser cannon blasts and sensor arrays, but is captured. Escaping Slab's prisoner pit, Zim retrieves the disc from under the sergeant's nose and disables the laser guard system. Left with no choice, Slab releases his mall-zombie army, recalling scenes from George A. Romero's *Dawn of the Dead* (1978), but the zombies are very dumb and easy to avoid.

EP12A (112A) "Bolognius Maximus"

Dib taunts Zim in the Skool cafeteria, then throws a slab of baloney on his head which burns Zim's skin. In revenge, Zim places a tack on Dib's chair, which injects baloney DNA into his body, fusing with his own. By the time Dib arrives at Skool the next day he's torn to shreds from dogs licking and attacking him, flies gather on him, and he gives off a strong aroma of boloney. The class protests.

> **Ms. Bitters:** Silence! If I have to put up with the awesome force of your collective child-stench every day, then so shall you all!

Later, realizing what has happened, Dib tricks Zim into also being injected with baloney DNA to force Zim to develop an antidote. Back at his base, Zim's security system no longer recognizes his altered DNA and ejects him as an intruder. Attempting to work together, Zim and Dib fail to formulate an antidote in Dib's lab. After a fight, they find themselves outdoors again surrounded by dogs, and run to the safety of an abandoned house, where the episode ends with both fully transformed into sausages.

EP12B (112B) "Game Slave 2"

In the second Zim-less episode, Gaz sees a commercial for the Game Slave 2, the latest version of her handheld system. She goes to the mall to buy one, but only after being delayed because Dib wanted to watch *Mysterious Mysteries* first. The line to purchase one is huge, and when Gaz is about to get the last unit, Iggins, behind her, tricks the clerk into selling it to him instead. Gaz demands justice and then haunts Iggins until scaring him into selling it to her in a skyscraper-elevator freefall. After Gaz exits, the elevator breaks, plummeting fifty flights into the ground with Iggins inside.

EP13 (113A & B) "Battle of the Planets"

On Mars, Zim discovers that another alien race had converted the planet (and another nearby) into giant ships before going extinct. Meanwhile, the Irken Armada is preparing to destroy all organic life on a planet in their first successful invader mission of Operation Impending Doom 2. In a speech preceding the organic sweep, the Tallest give credit to Zim (without him knowing) for not being there to mess everything up.

> **Almighty Tallest Red:** So let's give a big cheer for Invader Zim, for being so far away.

Dib, who has monitored Mars sensors since he was a baby, sees Zim and Gir, and realizes that Earth is in grave danger. Zim, after all, has decided to roll the surface of his Mars ship around on Earth, destroying all life. Dib begs for help at NASAPlace, but is ignored, then finds a fellow Swollen Eyeball member, the janitor, who lets him fly a secret capsule to Mercury, which is the other planet-ship. Dib battles Zim and Gir. After Zim's plan is thwarted, the Almighty Tallest laugh at him, not realizing that the runaway Mars ship has just crashed through their armada in the background.

EP14 (116A & B) "Halloween Spectacular of Spooky Doom"

At Skool, Dib keeps phasing in and out of an alternate nightmare zone that only he can see. Zim is terrified at the prospect of the other children turning into "candy-starved zombies," as Ms. Bitters describes them. Dib is sent to the Crazy House for Boys by the white coats for acting crazier than usual.

> **Professor Membrane:** So I find you here, son. Oh, I suppose it was only a matter of time.

In the alternate dimension, all the monsters want to fulfill the prophecy by escaping through Dib's giant head back to the real world. Briefly phased back to reality, Dib runs to Zim for help, asking to use his lab, but accidentally transports both Zim and himself back to the nightmare zone. After battling monster versions of Ms. Bitters, Professor Membrane, and Gaz, Zim and Dib escape through a portal in Dib's head. The Ms. Bitters monster begins to follow through, but is horrified at the sight of a bloated Gir and comatose children full of candy, and she retreats.

EP15A (114A) "Mysterious Mysteries"

Facing pressure to create a more exciting *Mysterious Mysteries* show, and with no other good prospects for stories, the TV host decides to dip into the Dib Archive of material that Dib has been sending in for years.

> **TV Host:** Thanks to a horribly large-headed boy named Dib, we have a new piece in the puzzle that is the search for alien life.

Dib, Zim, Gaz, and Gir retell their versions of the scene caught on video, which is reenacted terribly for the show. Zim is not outed as an alien.

EP15B (115B) "Future Dib"

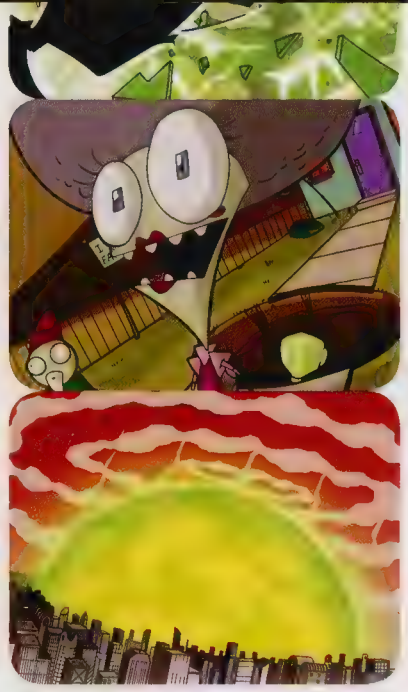
Professor Membrane prepares to make the greatest announcement that he's ever made since last week. He has created the Perpetual Energy Generator, or PEG, which he is about to activate. Either it will succeed, or it will send out a "wave of DOOM, that will destroy all life on Earth!" Zim sees this as his opportunity to destroy all life on Earth and plants a robotic Dib in Dib's bedroom to trick Dib into following its instructions and walking into his trap, a cage with a monkey in it. With Dib captured, Zim controls the robot Dib from his ship in orbit, planning to use it to gain access to the PEG, and set off the wave of destruction. From the cage, Dib is able to partially hack into the robot and manages to annoy Gaz enough that she beats it up until its eye pops out. Meanwhile, the crowd has been mean to Professor Membrane while waiting, and so he shuts down the PEG himself. Life returns to normal at home as Gaz now has repurposed the broken Dib robot as her personal servant, and Professor Membrane can't tell the difference. Meanwhile, Zim and Gir enjoy watching their favorite live TV show, a feed of Dib (now with a gray beard) still trapped in the cage with a monkey.

EP16A (115A) "Hobo 13"

Zim requests more powerful weapons from the Almighty Tallest in order to complete his mission.

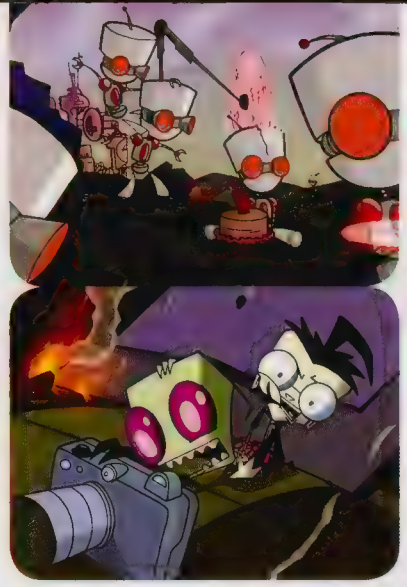
> **Almighty Tallest Red:** Your exile–er, mission–is to observe the planet, Zim. Not annihilate it.

The Tallest offer to send Zim to Hobo 13, where he'll "be torn limb from limb—er, evaluated—as a soldier!" Zim is required to lead a team of soldiers honorably through a series of trials, but he exploits and sacrifices each of them one by one. Given a new ship by the Tallest, he is pleased, until realizing that the controls are locked to send him straight into the churning furnace of the nearest star.



EP16B (118A) "Walk for Your Lives"

Zim has suspended Dib in a variable time stasis field to present to the Tallest on Probing Day, and he tries to show them during a video call. The experiment melts down, and creates a slow-motion explosion in Zim's lab. Zim tries to move the explosion to the city cesspit but fails, and it continues to explode in the middle of the city, growing slowly. Dib is also in slow motion. Zim decides to make the explosion happen at normal speed so that he can get it over with, because he expects the Almighty Tallest would be calling back in one hour. To do so, against the computer and Gir's urging, Zim launches slow-Dib into the explosion, and it explodes. The city is destroyed, including Zim's base. Dib stumbles into frame only to collapse on his face, where he remains, motionless.



EP17A (119B) "Megadoomer"

The Almighty Tallest take inventory of technology in a shipping center and see a holding chamber of malfunctioning SIR units attacking each other. They decide to send them to Zim, but a worker slave on the conquered shipping planet decides to rebel by switching the address labels on two boxes, resulting in Zim receiving the Megadoomer X-3 Combat Stealth Mech, the most powerful stealth robot in the Irken military. Zim receives the robot and immediately sets out to destroy Dib. The robot's cloaking mode makes only the robot transparent, leaving Zim visible as he stomps down the street. And the robot must remain plugged in, because it came with no batteries. (Gir must keep plugging it into new outlets along the way.) At Dib's house, the robot fails, and Dib takes lots of photos. Zim destroys the robot, and Dib realizes that he had left the lens cap on his camera.

EP17B (118B) "Lice"

There is a massive lice infestation at Skool. Countess von Verminstrasser the delouser arrives and quarantines the entire student body. The only ones lice-free are Ms. Bitters and Zim, who are sent for study. Zim's flesh is analyzed and found to destroy lice, and the Countess, Dib, Melvin, and others fall through the Skool floor into the lice queen's lair. Zim is placed into a delousing gun and his body is squeezed and shredded into lice-killing goo used to defeat the queen and delouse the children.

EP18A (114B) "Abducted"

Zim: Gir! Remember with your brains. You must behave like a human dog-monster. Do you understand?!

Two aliens abduct Zim and Gir as examples of an Earth human and dog for their collection. Though they have spent hundreds of years harvesting samples from around the universe, all have escaped but one alien, which is too heavy to get out of its enclosure after having been fused to too many objects, including a wrist watch, some piping, and an issue of *Johnny the Homicidal Maniac*. Zim and Gir escape the aliens and go home. The aliens move on to their next target, an Earth weasel, and proceed to abduct Dib.

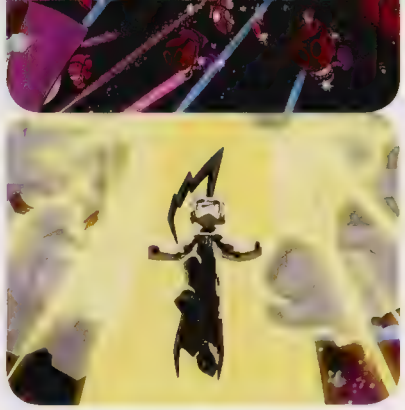
EP18B (117A) "The Sad, Sad Tale of Chickenfoot"

In the third Zim-less episode, Dib sets out to disprove the legend of Chickenfoot, who is obviously a man in a suit, because he sees the story as undermining the credibility of other paranormal cases that are legitimate. He succeeds in getting the man's costume zipper unstuck, which frees him from his suit, but then the news media concludes that all mysterious mysteries must also then be false. This is one of the grossest, creepiest episodes. The dirty chicken has a seeeecreeet . . .

EP19A (117B) "Gir Goes Crazy and Stuff"

Zim: Once I've tainted the human's meat supply with filth, they will be ripe for conquest. Soon the name of Invader Zim will be synonymous with DOOKIE!

Zim decides that it is time to do something about Gir's malfunctioning, so he attempts to lock him into "duty mode" with a behavioral modulator. Soon Gir's functioning SIR brain recognizes that Zim's stupidity is a threat to the mission and decides to eliminate him. Zim manages to revert Gir back to his old malfunctioning self with the help of a police officer whose brain has been replaced with a squid's.



EP19B (119A) "Dib's Wonderful Life of Doom"

In the Skool cafeteria, Zim is hit in the head with a muffin, and vows revenge on whoever threw it. He suspects Dib, but is not sure. Later that night, Dib is visited by other aliens who claim to also be battling the Irkens on their own planet. They grant Dib powers to help him in his own fight. The next morning, Professor Membrane acknowledges that Dib's genetic makeup has evolved, and Gaz apologizes to him for being mean. Dib's first stop with his new powers is Zim's house, where Zim gives himself up to the authorities and tells Gir to self-destruct. Next, Dib sets out to solve more paranormal mysteries, proving the existence of ghosts, lake monsters, and more. He spends his life battling aliens and saving the planet many times over, until he is an old man reminiscing on a talk show. The host asks one last question: Did Dib throw that muffin? And Dib admits that he did. The host and the entire audience turn into laughing Zims. It turns out that Dib's entire glorious life had been a simulation just to get him to admit to the muffin throw.

EP20 (120A & 120B) "Tak the Hideous New Girl"

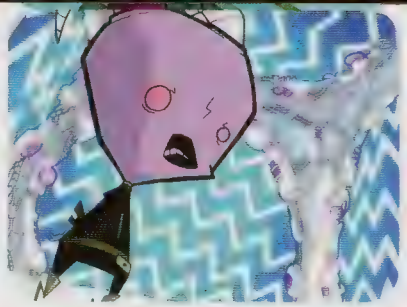
It's Valentine's Day at Skool, and the children pass out their traditional Valentine's Day meat slabs. A new girl at Skool arrives whose name is Tak, saying that her dad is the head of the Deelishus Weenie Corporation. She dumps weenies on the children and reads a poem to Zim, then throws a slab of barbecued ribs at him. Zim concludes that she is in love with him, and decides to use her to find out more about human affection.

Zim: I have come to accept your feelings for me. I congratulate you for acknowledging my superiority and for choosing me as your love-pig. FEEL HONORED!

Tak turns out to be Irken as well. Fifty years before, Zim had inadvertently caused Tak to miss her chance to become an elite Irken soldier or invader. Tak's planned revenge is to steal Earth from Zim to curry favor with the Tallest.

Tak: I'm a better invader than you'll ever be. I blend in perfectly. The plan I have in store for this nasty rock will so impress the Tallest, they'll have no choice but to make me an Invader.

Tak's plan is to build a magma pump to hollow out the earth's core, but Dib, Gaz, Gir, and Zim team up to defeat Tak.



EP21 (121A & 121B) "Backseat Drivers from Beyond the Stars"

The Almighty Tallest are traveling unusually close to Earth, and Zim implores them to stop by to see his latest diabolical plan to conquer mankind. It's a parasite that will eat the brains of all humans when let loose on the surface of Earth. Gir explodes out of a turkey that was sitting on a tray in the background.

Gir: It's me! I was the turkey all along!

Zim: I was wondering what that turkey was doing there . . .

Gir: I was the turkey! Meeeeeeee!

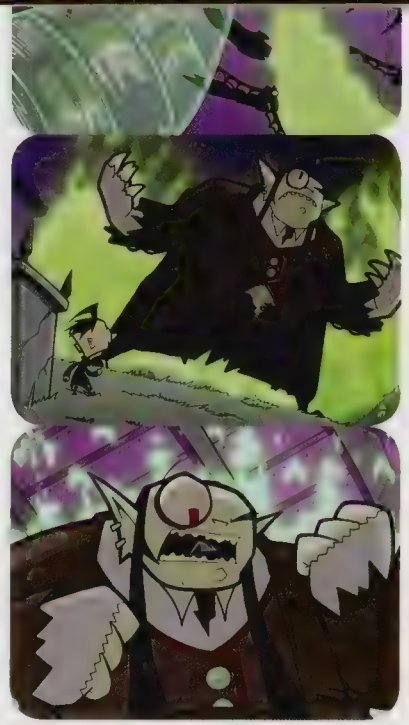
Zim: Yes, so you were.

Dib, having installed a spying device at Zim's base, and having recovered Tak's crashed ship, is now able to intercept information from Zim and interpret it. He learns about planet Vort, the top Irken military research prison-planet. Zim communicates with Prisoner 777 on planet Vort, and receives the schematics for the *Massive*, the Tallest's ship, which he had designed. Zim hacks into the controls of the *Massive* by locking on to the power core, and steers them toward Earth, all while a ship full of resistance fighters, known as the Resisty, follow and fire upon them. Dib then joins in the battle for control of the *Massive* by using Tak's ship to also hack control, attempting to steer it away from Earth. Meanwhile at Zim's base, the massive parasite is waking up since Gir did not maintain proper control levels, and the Roboparents have gone haywire, attracting the neighbors' attention by chewing on a child's head. After discovering Dib's spy device, Zim remotely activates Tak's ship's security system and wrests away control of the *Massive*. However, the Tallest have realized that their power core is being controlled from somewhere on Earth, and via teleportation, they swap the *Massive*'s power core with that of the Resisty ship. Zim, still thinking that he has the *Massive* in tow, prepares to show the Tallest his parasite and crush Dib.

Zim: Mankind ends now! And to make it even sweeter, I'll land the *Massive* right on top of your landing-pad-sized monster of a head, which is disturbingly large.

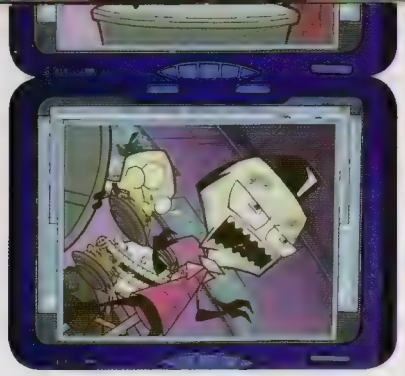
Dib: NOOOOOOOOOOO and quit making fun of my head AAAAAAAAAAHHHHHH!!!!

Once losing control of their own ship, the Resisty escape, and activate the Shrinky Self-Destruct. Just as Dib is about to be crushed by the Resisty ship, it has shrunk to the size of a fly, then pops in a tiny explosion. Meanwhile, Zim's brains are being eaten by the parasite, and the Almighty Tallest steer their repaired ship away from Earth.



EP22A (122B) "Mortos der Soulstealer"

Dib summons Mortos der Soulstealer from the graveyard to steal the soul of Zim, as his other methods of defeating Zim haven't been working. Mortos doesn't feel like stealing the alien's soul and tries to leave, but according to Dib's pamphlet, Mortos must grant the wish of one mortal before he returns to the underworld. Mortos says the pamphlet is stupid, but still goes with Dib, saying that he is tired and must recharge. Mortos eats fast food, tries on rubber pants, goes to a carnival, and cuddles puppies to recharge. At last charged up, Mortos grants some other guy a wish for some ice cream, and then returns to his spooky home for another thousand years. Dib gets arrested for his earlier loitering in the pet store.



EP22B (124A) "Zim Eats Waffles"

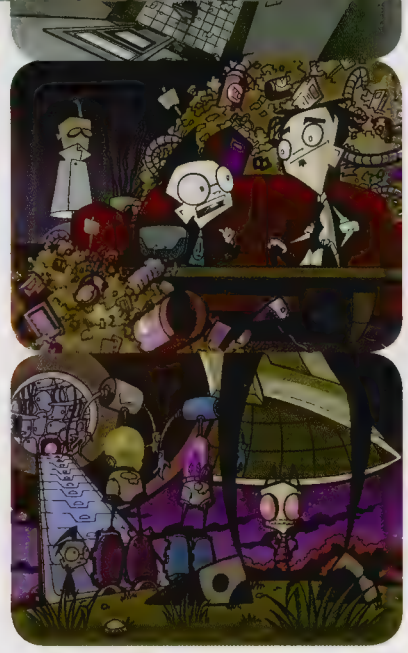
Dib asks Gir to place a secret video recording device in Zim's house and Gir says okay. Back in his bedroom, Dib monitors the activity in Zim's kitchen, where Gir has prepared waffles and Zim decides to eat some to build up a tolerance for filthy human food. Dib's recording drives are in repair mode, so he can only watch live and hope to catch Zim's next secret evil plan, but every time he calls a Swollen Eyeball member to witness the insanity in Zim's kitchen, such as flesh-eating squid attacks, Zim, Dib, and Nick (Zim's experimental test-human hostage), are just enjoying waffles.

EP23A (122A) "The Girl Who Cried Gnome"

A girl with cookies comes to Zim's door. Zim releases the robot gopher. The girl's foot gets stuck in the gopher mound, and the news media and a crowd gather with cameras in the front yard. Dib realizes an opportunity to expose Zim on national TV. President Man from President Land comes to give a speech. Zim eventually frees the girl himself just to get everyone to leave. Dib ends up stuck himself in the gopher mound.

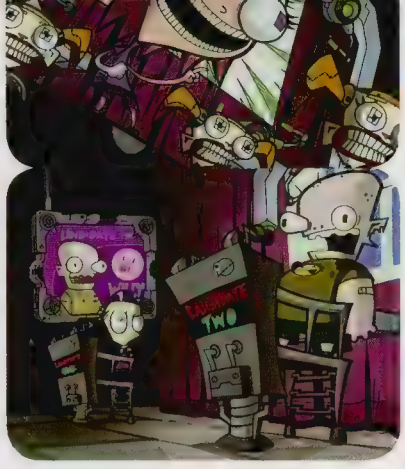
EP23B (124B) "Dibship Rising"

Dib works on Tak's ship. To stop the ship from always attacking him, Dib decides to delete Tak's personality, which was downloaded into the ship, and replace it with his own. The ship thinks that it is Dib, which causes problems, then Zim takes over and attempts to drop Dib into the city cesspit. Dib implores the ship to remember his life, which works enough to save him from death, but then the ship sits there, dangling over the pit despondent, concluding that it's a loser.



EP24A (126A) "Vindicated!"

Dib is sent to the school counselor Mr. Dwicky, who says that he also believes in aliens and agrees to help Dib expose Zim with a trap set in the woods. Mr. Dwicky and Dib pretend to be aliens and communicate with Zim. They promise to give Zim super weapons. After waiting into the night in the woods, Mr. Dwicky reveals to Dib that he didn't really believe in aliens but was just playing along to gain Dib's trust so that he could share what is really bothering him. Dib is crestfallen. Zim finally arrives in the woods looking for the super weapons that he was promised. Two real aliens show up, and Mr. Dwicky is excited and leaves with them, along with the video evidence of the encounter. Before leaving, however, the two aliens give Zim a load of super weapons that they just had lying around.



EP24B (126B) "The Voting of the Doomed"

At Skool, the student body president lapses in her school spirit and is removed by the Skool forces, triggering an immediate election for a new president. Volunteers to run include Zim and a drooling boy, Willy.

> **Zim:** As president, I will ensure that all mankind HAS ITS LEGS SAWED OFF! Eh . . . uh, and replaced with legs of pure gold! Yes, and I will grant you the power to fire lasers from your head!

Dib realizes that Zim is promising anything and lying, and that he will win unless Willy gets help. He offers his services as Willy's campaign manager.

> **Dib:** Pardon me, but if you don't tackle the real issues, Zim is going to win the election and eradicate all human life!

Willy wins with Dib's help, but is then immediately brainwashed to spout pro-Skool propaganda by shrouded figures in the principal's office. Zim snarkily thanks Dib for sparing him that fate.

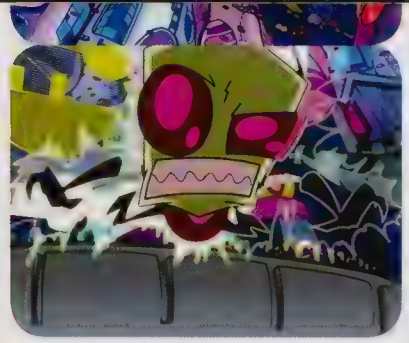
EP25 (125A & B) "Gaz, Taster of Pork"

Dib is in possession of ancient spelldrives that can cast a variety of spells, but they are all empty of power points. Dib discovers that one drive has two remaining power points and so he tests a spell on Gaz to see what it does. The spell makes everything that Gaz eats taste like pork. Professor Membrane proceeds with horrible tests on Gaz, and Gaz vows to destroy Dib's life if she misses eating the new Bloaty's Pizza Hog pizza flavor that was about to debut. Dib realizes he needs to find a way to reverse the spell. Dib and Gaz transport themselves through the spelldrive to the realm of the Shadowhog, where Gaz must face the terrible trial of the Shadowhog, which she passes easily. Dib is punished. Later at Bloaty's Pizza Hog:

Professor Membrane: Sorry about imprisoning you and turning you into a media freak, honey. But it was in the name of science, and . . . hey, where's your brother?

Gaz: He's in a pig world netherworld cleaning out toilets with his head.

Professor Membrane: HAHA! You're my funny child.



EP26 (123A & B) "The Frycook What Came from All That Space"

At Skool, a giant alien monster crashes through the ceiling and flies away with Zim. It's Sizz-Lorr, the Irken who Zim had escaped from on planet Foodcourtia. Before the first episode, Zim had been punished for single-handedly destroying Operation Impending Doom 1. His punishment was to be re-encoded as a food service drone on the Irken snacking planet. Fry-lord Sizz-Lorr is intent on making Zim suffer through working in the restaurant, especially as the twenty-year long Foodening approaches, a frenzy of snacking so great, that its gravitational pull prevents anybody from leaving the planet for its duration. With only one day left before the Foodening, Zim learns from Eric, the blob-customer, that the security system can be bested if the escapee hides buried within enough layers of filthy trash in a garbage container. Zim formulates a plan instead to be disguised as Eric's food, and escapes after being eaten whole, layered inside the filth of Eric's body. Sizz-Lorr discovers the escape and a chase ensues, with Zim fleeing back to Earth and Sizz-Lorr stuck on Foodcourtia for another twenty-year Foodening.

EP27 (130B & 131A) "The Most Horrible X-Mas Ever"

Zim sees Santas everywhere and how much everyone loves them, so he abducts a mall Santa and drains his brains of all Santa knowledge. Soon, Zim, dressed as Santa, appears and everyone is joyful for his return, including President Man, who steps aside for Santa's reign to begin. Zim claims a new world order. It also turns out that Professor Membrane hates Santa and has devoted a portion of his life to destroying Santa. At his fascist-y rally, Santa-Zim announces a new Christmas tradition, the Yuletide Helping of Santa to Build a Giant Teleporter Capable of Sending All Humans to Their Doom. However, Zim's Santa suit begins to malfunction and engulf him, making him do Christmasy things. Dib, dressed as an elf, tries to thwart Zim but is dumped in a frozen wasteland and trapped in a Jingle Jail until Gaz rescues him in Tak's ship, so that she can beat him up. Professor Membrane gives Dib access to his anti-Santa arsenal that he created when he was a kid. Meanwhile, the Santa suit fully engulfs Zim before he can send people to their doom. Dib flies in and blasts Santa with his anti-Santa mega mech robot, which makes the Santa suit grow giant, mutate, and fight back. Zim escapes the suit and Dib launches the Santa suit into space. The suit then grows strong in space and returns every year on Christmas Eve, hungry for milk and cookies, for the next two million years.

4: A SECRET COMICS LABORATORY

WRITING AND DESIGNING THE ZIM COMICS

A Downer Ending?

Despite the monumental efforts behind the scenes, *Zim* the series was a short-lived beast. Nickelodeon produced two seasons (twenty episodes in season one, and seven in season two) for a total of twenty-seven episodes, and only aired about three quarters of them during its initial run of 2001–02. Low ratings and the relatively expensive production costs for *Zim* were the one-two punches of doom for the series. Nickelodeon's sister channel Nicktoons finally broadcast the remaining unaired episodes in 2006.

What seems like a downer ending, wasn't. Throughout its brief run and well after cancellation, *Zim* received positive press and was showered with awards and nominations, winning a Primetime Emmy, an Annie Award, and a World Animation Celebration award. The *Zim* crew was also nominated for six more individual Annies and a Golden Reel Award for the sound design from Motion Picture Sound Editors, USA.

Beyond the recognition, Zim developed a cult following, buoyed by the fan infrastructure developing on the Internet and the DVD release of a collection of episodes in 2004 by Anime Works and Nickelodeon, followed by several more collections in various formats. Despite canceling the show, Nickelodeon licensees kept a healthy merchandising flow into stores, which fed the *Zim* love through malls nationwide via character toys, shirts, and tchotchkes.

As late as 2011, there was even enough critical mass among *Zim* fans to justify its own convention in Atlanta, dubbed InvaderCON, which was followed by a second event in 2012, InvaderCON II: DOOMCON, which took place in Los Angeles. Both featured special

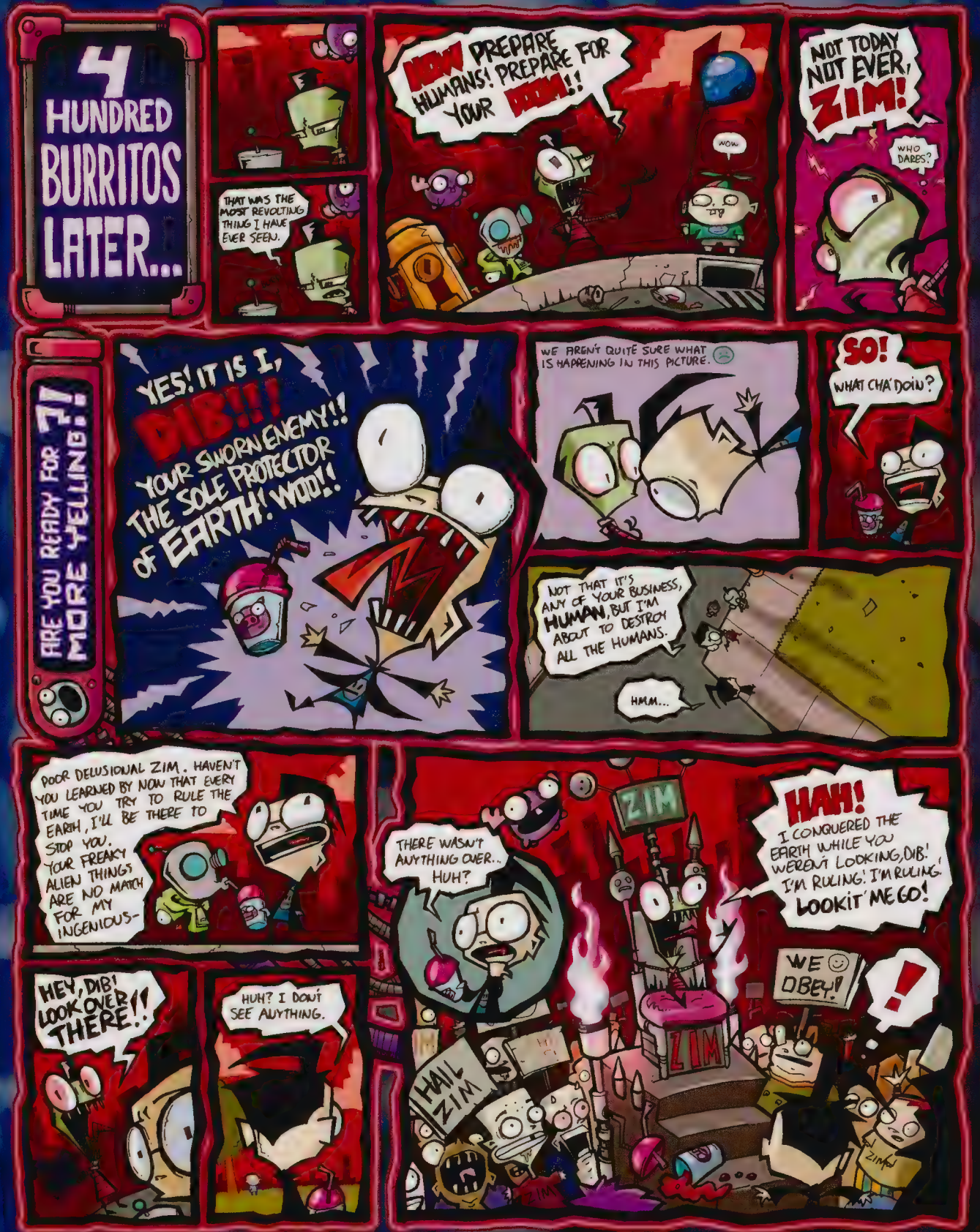
(Continued on page 190)

Opposite: *Invader Zim* issue #1 variant cover art by Vincent Perea.

Left, top to bottom: Issue #1 variant cover art by Aaron Alexovich with Simon Troussellier, issue #1 variant cover art by Ian McGinty with Fred C. Stresing, and issue #21 cover art by Dave Crosland.

Overleaf: Two page *Zim* comic by Jhonen for *Nickelodeon Magazine*.

YEP... I SURE AM ZIM.
NYEEHHH...
ZIM
AND DO YOU KNOW HOW I KNOW I AM ZIM?
SQUEEK!
MAGICAL GOBLIN BABIES?!!
NOOO... YOU ARE BOTH WRONG.
SO HORRIBLY WRONG.
SHOCK!
HOW DO THIS BE?!
WHUH?!!
DISBELIEF!
WRONG!!
I AM ZIM BECAUSE I AM AMAZING!! (LIKE A ZIM)
I HAVE DISCOVERED THE ONE FLAW IN MY PLAN TO CONQUER THE EARTH!
TELL MEEE ALL ABOUDIT.
ARE YOU READY TO HEAR THE SECRET?
NUH UH!
IT'S ALL IN THE THUMBS!
SQUEEK!
SEE... I'VE BEEN WIGGLING MINE LIKE THIS
BUT HUMANS, THEY WIGGLE 'EM LIKE THIS!
NOW, WITH MY HUMAN DISGUISE PERFECTED, I CAN TAKE OVER THE EARTH!
NEAT!
NOW...
TO CONQUER!
MOOSE
ZOOM!!
WOOOOOOO!!
BUT I JUST MADE THIS BURRITO! IT SO WARM AND BEANY!
GIR!!... FINE. BUT HURRY UP!! I WANNA RULE THE EARTH!


4 HUNDRED BURRITOS LATER...
THAT WAS THE MOST REVOLTING THING I HAVE EVER SEEN.
NOW PREPARE HUMANS! PREPARE FOR YOUR DOOM!!
WOW
NOT TODAY NOT EVER, ZIM!
WHO DARES?
ARE YOU READY FOR MORE YELLING?!
YES! IT IS I, DIB!!! YOUR SWORN ENEMY!! THE SOLE PROTECTOR OF EARTH! WOO!!
WE AREN'T QUITE SURE WHAT IS HAPPENING IN THIS PICTURE.
SO! WHAT CHA' DOIN?
NOT THAT IT'S ANY OF YOUR BUSINESS, HUMAN, BUT I'M ABOUT TO DESTROY ALL THE HUMANS.
HMM...
POOR DELUSIONAL ZIM. HAVEN'T YOU LEARNED BY NOW THAT EVERY TIME YOU TRY TO RULE THE EARTH, I'LL BE THERE TO STOP YOU. YOUR FREAKY ALIEN THINGS ARE NO MATCH FOR MY INGENIOUS-
HEY, DIB! LOOK OVER THERE!!
HUH? I DON'T SEE ANYTHING.
THERE WASN'T ANYTHING OVER.. HUH?
ZIM
HAH! I CONQUERED THE EARTH WHILE YOU WEREN'T LOOKING, DIB! I'M RULING! I'M RULING. LOOKIT' ME GO!
WE OBEY!
HAIL ZIM
ZIM
ZIM

guest artists and voice actors from the crew—even Jhonen himself for the California event.

A single stand-alone *Zim* comic by Jhonen was published in *Nickelodeon Magazine*, which was the lone *Zim*-related comics example until 2015, when Oni Press released a new series of *Zim* stories. The *Zim* energy had built to a cresting wave.

Un-Death of Zim

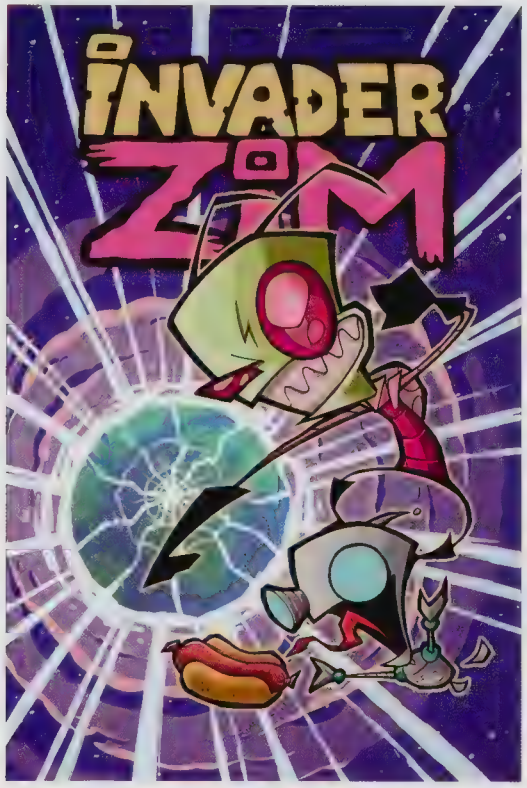
Jhonen Vasquez [series creator]: I think we saw it coming, because from the moment that it was released, *Invader Zim* made absolutely no sense on Nickelodeon because it didn't have a home. The original idea was to have it be part of this more mature, action-oriented block to kind of compete with some of the stuff that Cartoon Network was doing. And it never came to pass, so *Zim* was the only product of that experiment. For the duration of its run, it was in between *Rocket Power* and *Fairly OddParents*, and it just didn't make sense. Alarm bells were ringing from day one, and I think we were surprised that it lasted as long as it did! At some point we were like, "How long can we do this before we get kicked out?" We had to make the show be what it was going to be.

Jhonen did keep creatively busy during those post-*Zim* years. While developing a project that didn't get produced at Disney, Jhonen jumped at the chance to create character designs for *Randy Cunningham: 9th Grade Ninja* which premiered on Disney XD in 2012.

Jhonen: After *Zim* I definitely wanted to take a break from animation, especially kids' animation. But it's just one of those things, though, that if you give me the opportunity to create a new project, my brain can't help but want to see what I can come up with, because I just love dreaming stuff up.

I was developing a series over at Disney at the time, and it was taking so long and the process was just so grueling, and *Randy* popped up. It was just an opportunity to do some character designs–I wasn't really involved beyond sort of restyling the show. But I jumped at the chance to work on something like that, just to kind of feel like something was actually going to happen, that there was going to be movement on something. It was nice to be able to see a show come out and to be able to say, "Look, there is something I worked on, there it is." Versus just being trapped in development hell. So *Randy* was me wanting to work on something that was actually going to get made.

Above: Jhonen's thumbnail sketches for a comics cover idea, and the cover art to *Invader Zim* #1 by Aaron Alexovich with Rikki Simons.



Jhonen's post-*Zim* projects included developing work for more mature audiences as well, but they too did not bear fruit.

Jhonen: There were a few other projects in there. For one, I was working on a couple of segments for this *Heavy Metal* movie that was being produced by Blur Studios. It was spearheaded by Tim Miller, who went on to direct *Deadpool*, and David Fincher was producing this thing. It was great; it wasn't going to be for kids, it was a horror and sci-fi anthology, and I was going to be one of the directors right alongside Guillermo del Toro. It was really cool, but it really didn't stand a chance. For all the things that made it cool, they were all the things that doomed it, basically. Adult animation for a theatrical run, an anthology—all of the things that this country has still not been known to make successful, which is really too bad.

Back at Disney, Jhonen cocreated and developed a pitch for a series with longtime friend Jenny Goldberg called *Very Important House* through 2016 which, again, did not get a green light.

Jhonen: *Very Important House* was the definition of heartbreak. Since *Zim*, this was the first time that it felt like a project that was worth all of the toil and misery of working in animation. Jenny and I put so much of ourselves into it, and, like what happens with a lot of things, it just didn't fly. It got put in front of the wrong people, and those people are the gatekeepers between you and an audience that might love a thing, or hate a thing, but you never really get a chance to find out. It ended up dying at the pilot phase, and we never even really got a pilot. We were supposed to have eleven minutes of animation, which is really what we were working toward because we just wanted to see this thing come to life. It's just that we came along at one of those times when a studio was transitioning from one regime to the next, and we stopped being cared for and started being this sort of holdover from the previous team of people who were no longer there.

Turtle Power

Deep into the *Very Important House* struggle, Jhonen took on a gig writing, voice directing, and co–character designing a new *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* short, "Don vs. Raph" in 2016 back at Nickelodeon.

Jhonen: "Don vs Raph" popped up during *Very Important House*, while it had been dragging on for so long, and we were just so unhappy with the process by that point. It was the prospect of something short,

(Continued on page 194)

Above: The cover art to *Invader Zim* #2 by Aaron Alexovich with Rikki Simons and J.R. Goldberg, #4 by Aaron Alexovich with Rikki Simons, and #5 by Aaron Alexovich with Savanna Ganucheau.

Overleaf: 1. Trade paperback Vol. 2 art by Dave Crosland. 2. Issue #6 cover art by KC Green. 3. Issue #7 cover art by Dave Crossland and Warren Wucinich. 4. Issue #8 cover art by Dave Crosland with Warren Wucinich. 5. Issue #9 cover art by Dave Crosland with Warren Wucinich. 6. Issue #10 cover art by Dave Crosland with Warren Wucinich. 7. Issue #1 cover art variant by Bryan Konietzko.

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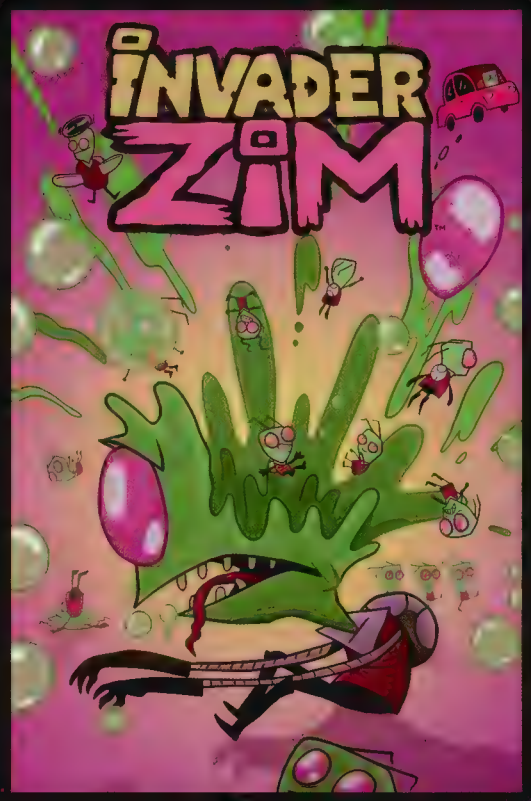
INVADER
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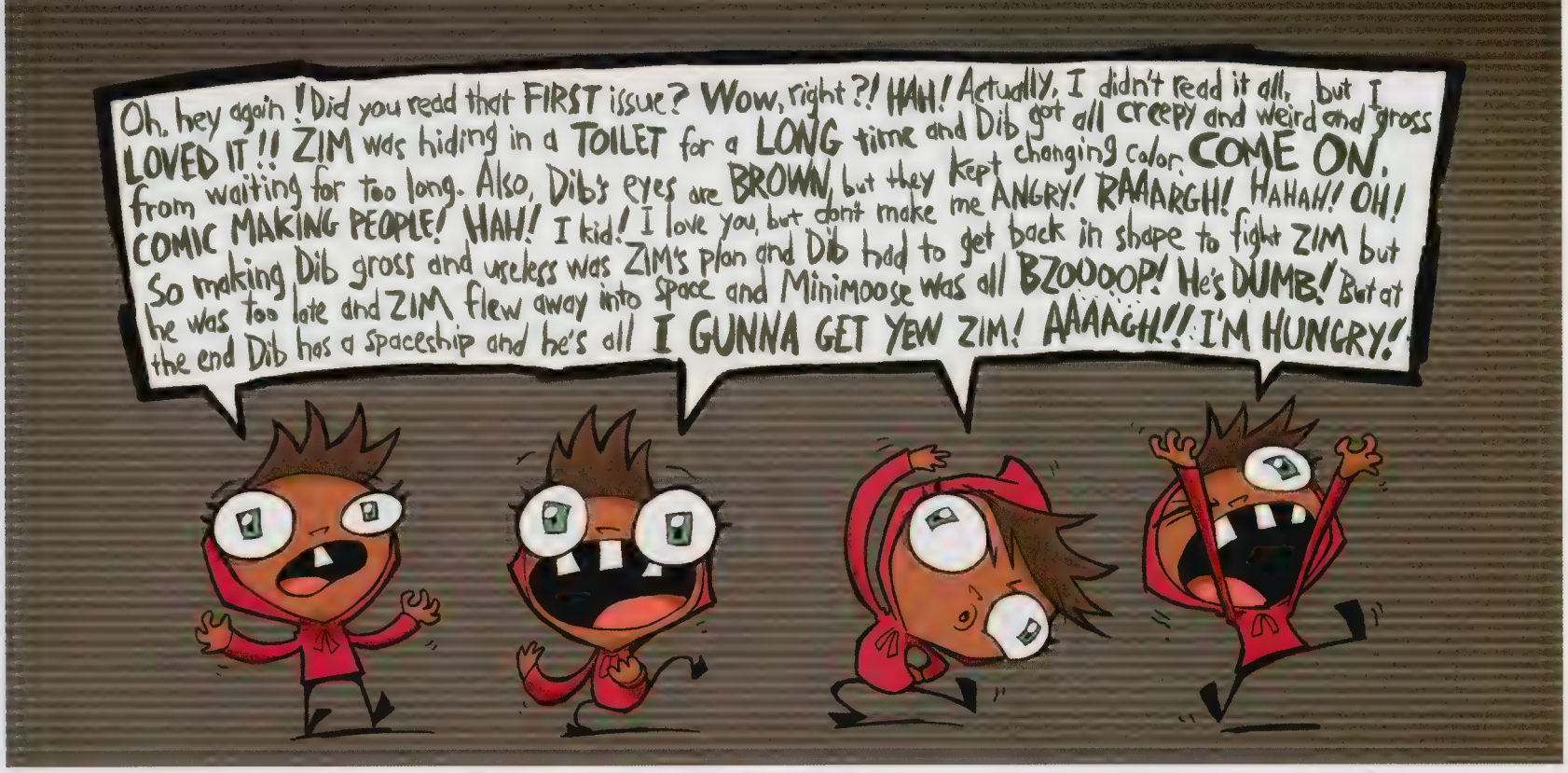


something that was definitely going to get made, and the people from Nickelodeon at the time who contacted me about doing this, these weren't people from my original time at Nickelodeon. These were people who were newer, and who had grown up with the idea of *Zim* as a cool thing and not a curse upon their studio. So it was a completely different attitude that they approached me with. They just wanted me to make anything for them, they were enthusiastic, they were excited, and it was just the nicest feeling when we were otherwise in the middle of a nightmare project, battling to prove that our ideas were worth making. So having someone just come up and say, "Hey. We know what you do. We like what you do. Just make something! Make something with these ninja turtles." It was exactly what I needed at the time and was one of the more liberating things to have happened to me in years.

So I pitched the idea, wrote the script, and with Titmouse animation I codirected it with a guy named Sung-Jin Ahn. Everyone got it. Everyone was just having a fun time on it. The voice actors had a fun time; everything just worked. Which isn't to say that things being fun and smooth means that you're going to end up with something good, but in this case, it worked out; people liked it. I was proud of what we achieved, and it got a lot of attention. It was a rare thing. I'm not used to things running that smoothly.

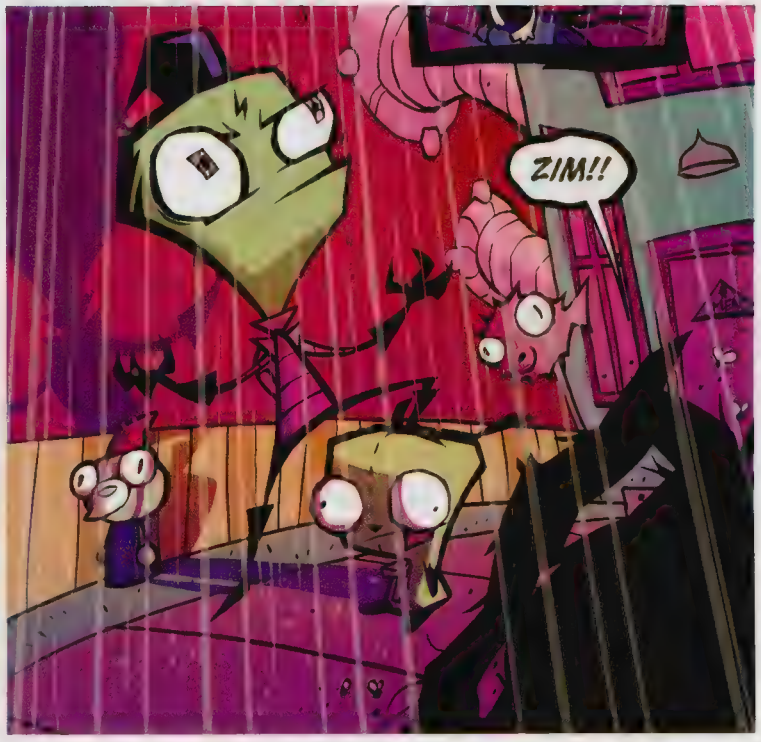
Comics to the Rescue

All along, however, through the project successes and failures, the *Zim* characters never stopped living and bopping around in Jhonen's head, playing out all new scenarios of paranoia and madness. Oni Press provided a much-needed escape hatch for them in the form of a new ongoing comics series, which launched in 2015 (a year before "Don and Raph") and provided a platform, beyond Jhonen's own private imaginings, for the *Zim* characters and their narrative to return.

Jhonen: We tried to treat the comics just like we were making cartoons.

Eric Trueheart [writer]: The story content between an eleven minute episode and a comic book is almost exactly the same. Depending on how many panels you devote to Zim screaming, of course. When I rewrote the lost episode idea "PANTS!" for the comic book, it came out almost identical to how it would have been on screen.

Above: Recap Kid gets excited about comics.



Jhonen: We got to play a little bit with the format of being a comic book. We added a character who was a little more self-aware: Even though they don't really have a lot of crossover with the content, we came up with a character whose existence is to just recap previous issues, and they became a character called Recap Kid. Which is something we never did with the series; we didn't have the series be self-aware. In the comics, at least in the front matter, we play with that. In the comics themselves the characters still don't know that they're in a comic book.

Recap Kid quickly became a fan favorite. The kid has no other name and is gender-nonspecific, allowing them to purely personify comics enthusiasm for every and any reader. Recap Kid's excitement is contagious, as they spout off run-on sentences detailing the last issue and dropping hints about the one about to begin.

For the initial five issues, Aaron Alexovich was the main artist with Megan Lawton on inks, which set the tone. It was a natural fit for Aaron, who, besides *Zim*, has mostly worked in comics on his own series *Serenity Rose*, *Vicious Whispers*, and more.

Aaron Alexovich [character designer]: I would take a script from Jhonen or Eric Trueheart, and then do layouts, thumbnails.

The comics series also served as a laboratory for character-design evolution.

Aaron: I don't think it was intended to be that, but of course it *was* that, since this was the first time Jhonen was taking a look at the characters after the series ended. It was an opportunity to update and freshen them up a little bit. So we definitely seized that opportunity.

Gaz changed quite a bit. Honestly, on the show, I don't think we ever quite 100 percent figured out her design. It wasn't until the toys came out that I really even understood her hair. It's a really strange shape to work with. We streamlined her–her hair is more rounded off, and we gave her a different outfit. She looks more like some tough gamer now. She has this shirt with a digital-looking bunny skull and these big clomping boots.

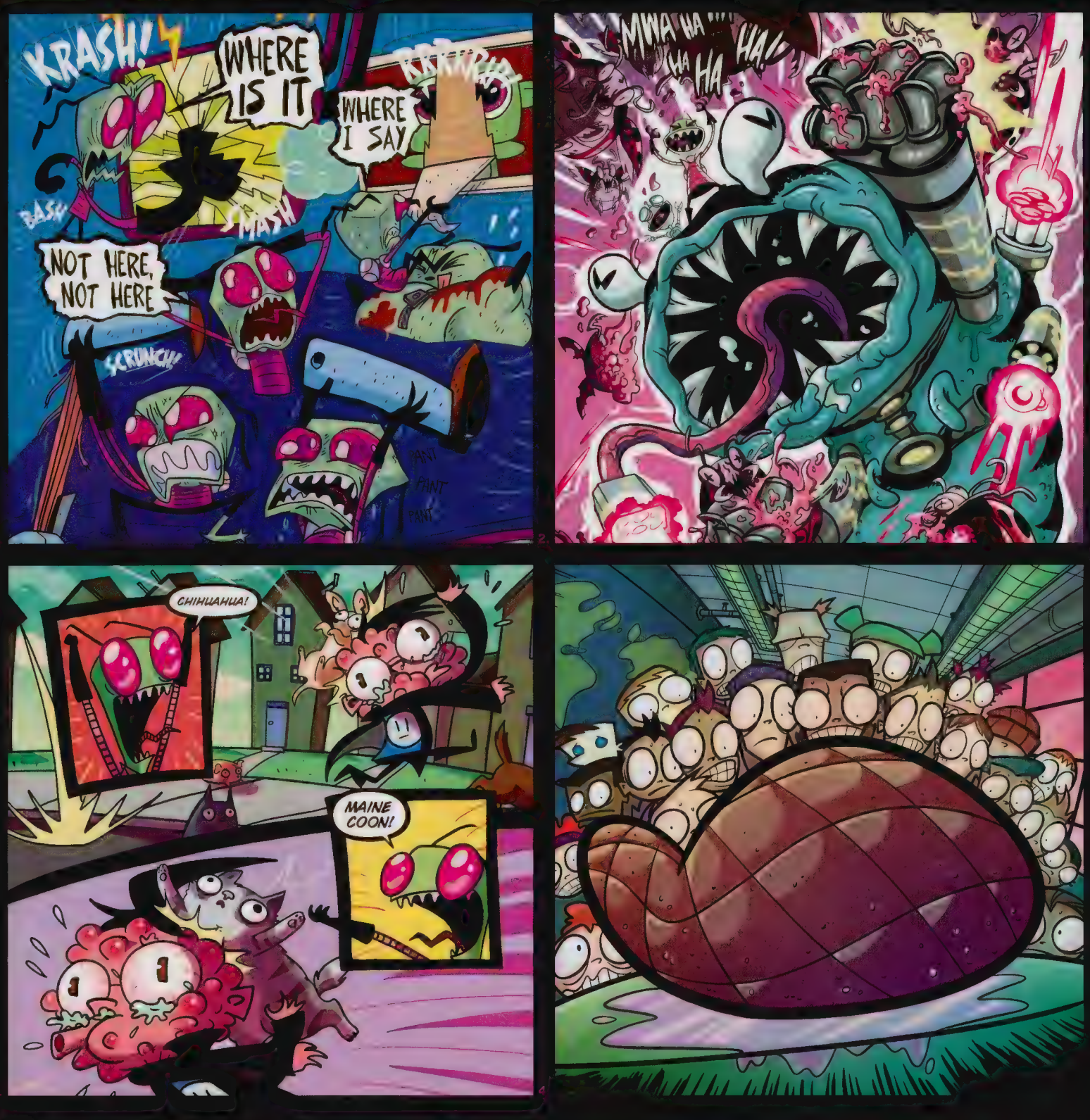
Dib got an upgrade as well. He's got a little ghost on his shirt now. Dib has hair on the sides of his head now, too [instead of closely shaved to the skin]. Which is interesting because it seems like current popular style has recently gone the other direction. [*laughs*]

Jhonen enlisted the help of Jenny Goldberg to do touch-up corrections on comics artwork, color pages, and essentially fill the role of an art director for the first

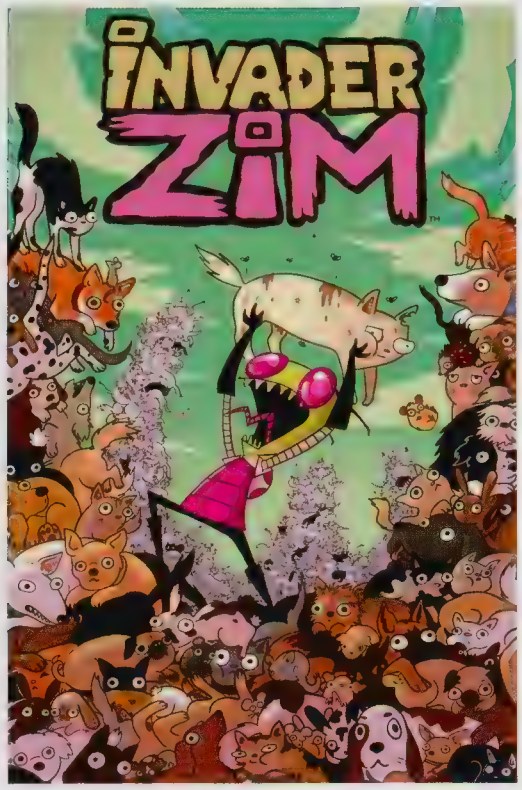
(Continued on page 198)

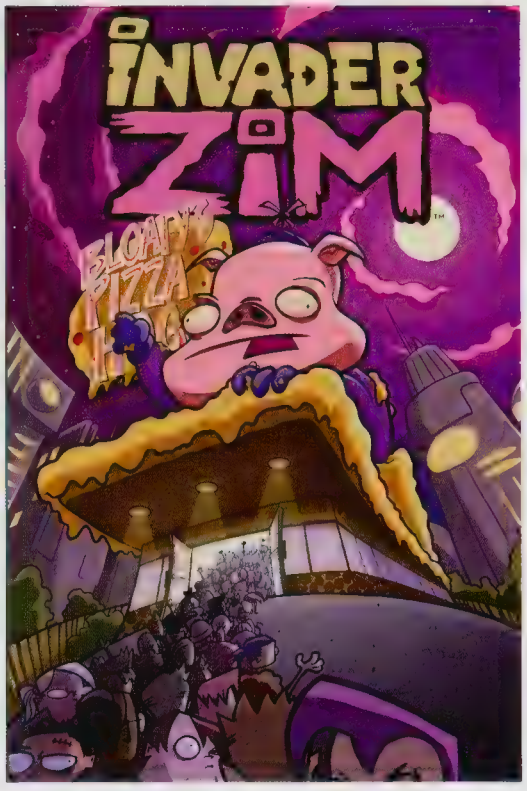
Above: Two panel details from *Invader Zim* issue #1, with art by Aaron Alexovich, inks by Megan Lawton, and colors by Simon "Hutt" Troussellier.

Overleaf: Various *Invader Zim* comics interior art details by 1. KC Green with Savanna Ganucheau 2. Dave Crosland with Warren Wucinich 3. Sarah Andersen with Katy Farina 4. Warren Wucinich with Fred C. Stresing 5. Dave Crosland with Fred C. Stresing 6. Megan Lawton 7. Aaron Alexovich with Cassie Kelly 8. Dave Crosland with Warren Wucinich.


KRASH!
WHERE IS IT
WHERE I SAY
BASH
SMASH
NOT HERE, NOT HERE
SCRUNCH
PANT
PANT
PANT
MWA HA HA HA HA!
2.
CHIHUAHUA!
MAINE COON!
3.
4.

"DIB, DIB, DIB, YOU'VE GOT IT ALL WRONG."
AND STOKING MY DREAM WHILE PATTING MY HEAD ZIM LAUGHS
"YOU'VE BEEN ONE OF US ALL ALONG"
HEHEH HA HA HA





six issues (and then issue #9, too, as well as a cover for the series).

Jenny Goldberg [art director]: I started art directing the comics because the colors that were coming back were looking not quite like what Jhonen wanted. So Jhonen and I had long discussions about what an updated version of *Zim* would be. We referenced a lot of French comics artwork. I also discussed with him what the show made me feel, visually, versus what it actually was, when I was growing up with it.

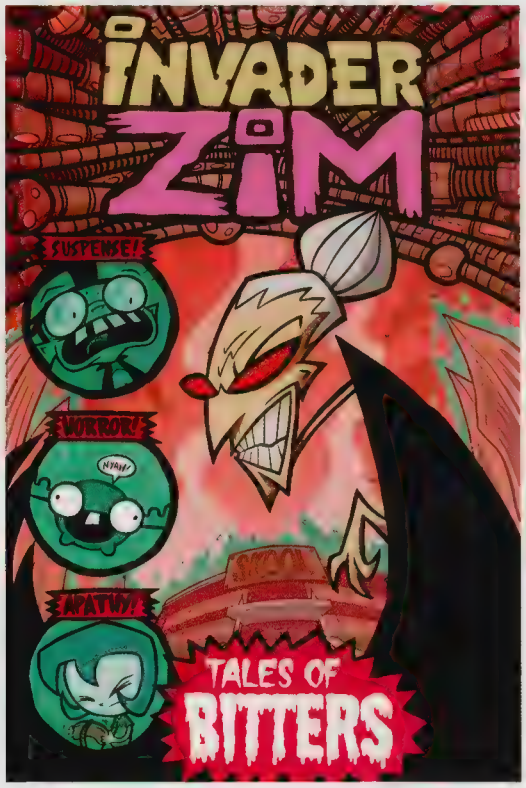
I noticed that when a lot of people talk about the colors for *Zim*, as they remember them, they were kind of bright and saturated and psychotic-looking—people remember the show being insane-looking. But I rewatched all the episodes for myself to work on the colors for the comics and the movie, and the actual color scheme is super desaturated. It's a purple-black, a dirty red, olive green, and ham-pink. It's the weirdest palette, and it's genuinely kind of gross. It finds its legs more in season two, but in the first season it was like, "Oh my God, this is not what I recall from my memories of this show!" Everybody else that I talked to had the same reaction. So what I was trying to do is pull more from what the show gave me, and what the show made me feel in order to update the color scheme for it, as opposed to plucking colors directly from the old series.

The comics series offered a wide-open sandbox for talented artists and writers to play in. As the series progressed, the editorial team at Oni engaged a variety of independent creators such as KC Green, Maddie C., Dave Crosland, and more to play with Zim, Dib, and associates. The series followed the example of some—but not all—other licensed cartoon comic book series in which the artwork is rendered in each of the artist's personal styles as opposed to requiring rigid on-model work. The artists responded by creating a wild variety of scenarios in the main and secondary stories, featuring mind-swapping, a rare Poop Cola, a fake zoo, Mr. Weiner Face, mutant animals, a private space prison, and much more.

Jhonen: I was heavily involved in the first five issues, and I wrote a few after that, also doing the occasional cover art. After that it was mainly that I would check in on what the stories were going to be and pitch in a little bit when Zim seemed too off-character.
It is fun seeing the issues where I've been the most removed, so that I actually get to enjoy *Zim* stories in the way that the fans do. It's fun for me to sit down and read an issue and not know what's going to

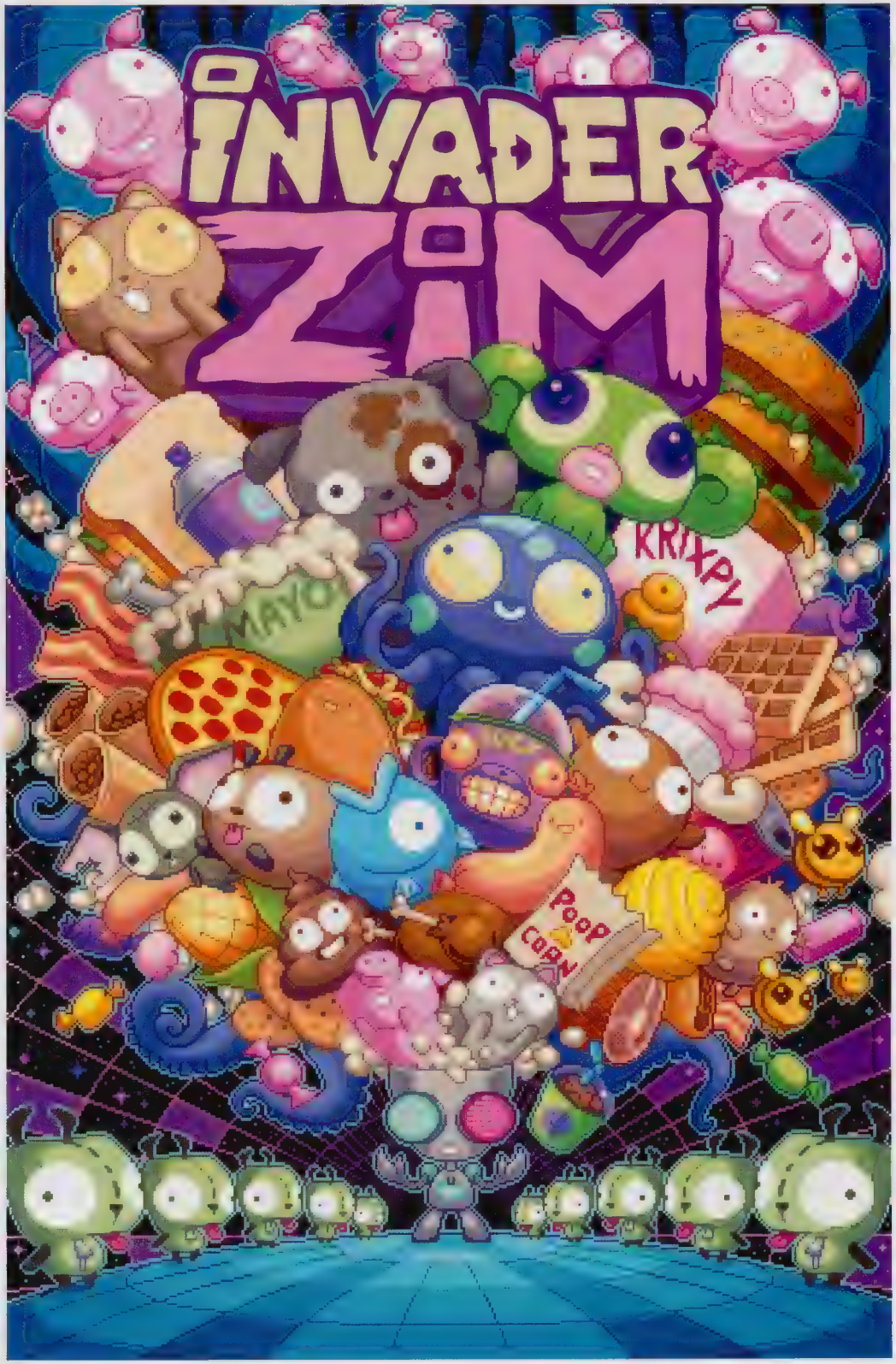
This spread: *Invader Zim* #11 cover art by Sarah Andersen, #13 cover art by Warren Wucinich, #14 cover art by Warren Wucinich, #15 cover art by Warren Wucinich, and the *Invader Zim* Vol. 4 Oni Exclusive trade paperback cover art by Paul Robertson.

Overleaf: 1. *Invader Zim* Vol. 2 Oni Exclusive trade paperback cover art by Jhonen Vasquez. 2. Vol. 2 trade paperback cover art by Dave Crosland with Warren Wucinich. 3. #5 variant cover art by Jhonen Vasquez. 4. Vol. 1 trade paperback art by Aaron Alexovich with Simon

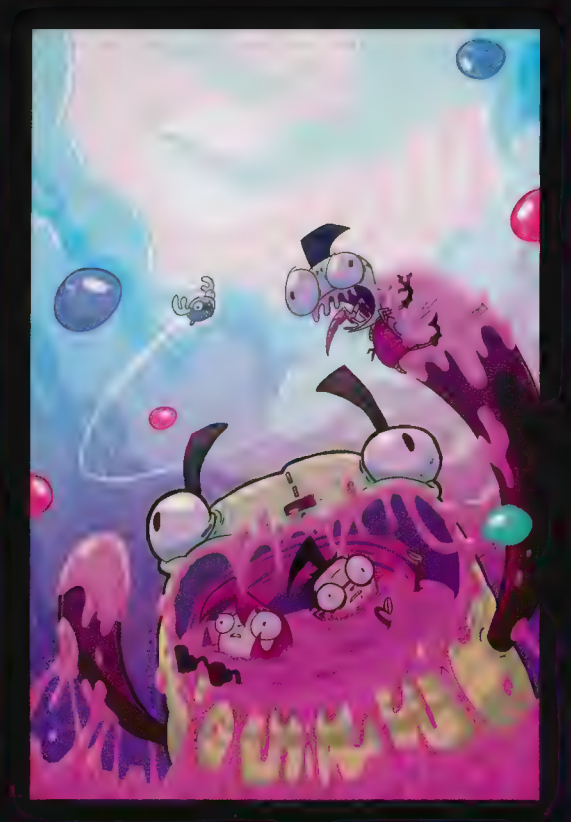


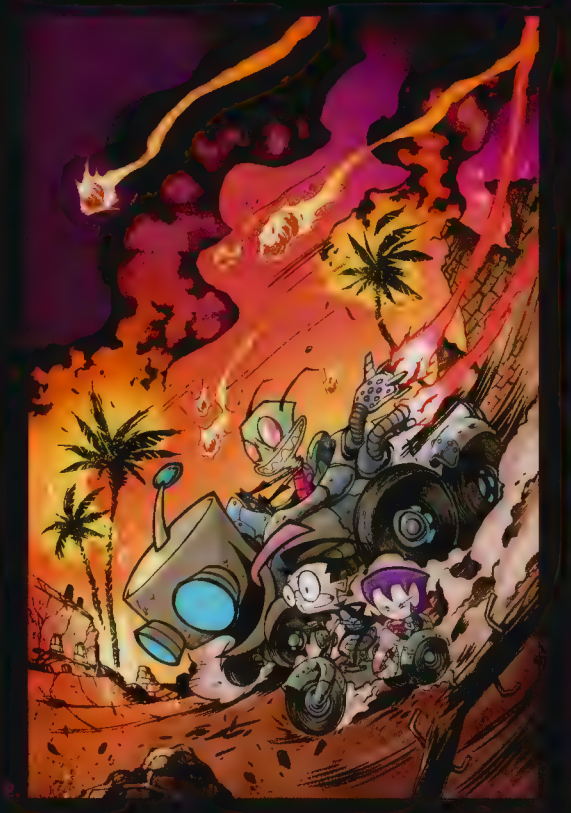
happen–I don't know this artist, so this is weird to me, but it's also exciting. It's cool to see your character doing things outside of your control. Sometimes it's like, "Ewwwgh! I would not have ever done this! This is weird!" Other times I'm laughing because it's not something that I would have ever done, but it's funny.

The comics had provided a soft relaunch back into the world of *Zim* for Jhonen and key collaborators. *Zim* was now primed and ready for his glorious, pulsating, feature film debut. Jhonen soon found himself once again working in the studio, plotting out the nefarious machinations of *Invader Zim*. Thankfully, Earth's impending doom had been resurrected.



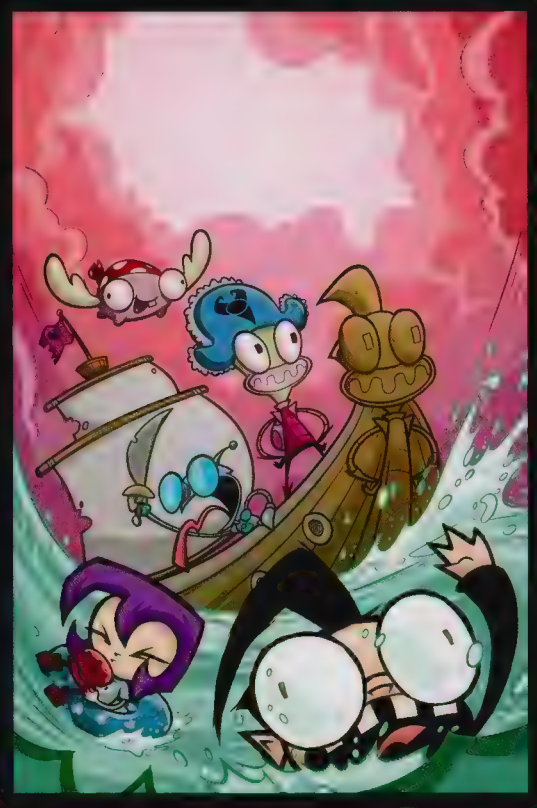
Troussellier. 5. Vol. 4 trade paperback cover art by Warren Wucinich. 6. *Invader Zim* #1 cover art variant by Jhonen Vasquez with J.R. Goldberg.





INVADER
ZIM

ZIM
EARTH LOVES ZIM
ZIM



5: THE CINEMATIC ZIM

WRITING AND DESIGNING THE ZIM MOVIE

Suddenly, Zim has returned to invade homes one stream at a time on Netflix in a brand-new feature-length movie: *Invader Zim: Enter the Florpus!*

For *Zim*'s return to the small screen, almost everything has changed. Televisions are now high-definition widescreens. The format is now feature-length. The crew is mostly new and young enough to have grown up with *Zim* themselves. Original fans of the series are now young adults primed for nostalgia, but they are now also armed with limber and wriggling typing fingers, ready to pounce with one-star vengeance on any production that does not meet their expectations. And don't forget the children! The actual, primary audience of cartoon productions rated TV-Y7-FV [designed for children age seven and above; includes fantasy violence] is a mass of youth who are potentially new to *Zim* in the first place. How will their spongy brains absorb the madness?

The overall time frame for production on the movie, which began in earnest in 2016, provided ample time to reimagine and revise every element of *Zim* from the ground up, but the movie was going to have to be produced and launched with care.

Fortunately, the creative partnership of two of the primary figures behind this movie had been building cohesion and trust for years: longtime friends Jhonen and Jenny.

Jenny Goldberg [art director]: The first thing Jhonen and I ever collaborated on was back when I was in college. We did this horrifically stupid little book called *Jellyfist*, which came out and disappeared immediately (which I was kind of thankful for). It was awful. Jhonen wrote these micro-scripts, and then I would just draw comics based on these scripts with no guidance, and then he would tell me how much he hated them, and then we would write in the margins of the comic a back-and-forth

Opposite: Background art from *Enter the Florpus*.

This page: Stills from the opening sequence of *Enter the Florpus* in which Dib's monologue is accompanied by dramatically stylish visuals.

between the two of us, with him telling me how much I strayed from the original idea. He and I have been friends since I was eighteen, and we've constantly been drawing together. There was probably about five or six years of us trying to get *Very Important House* off the ground. There was the *Zim* comics and now this movie, so we have a long history of working together.

I've been fortunate to have known Jhonen as well as I do and have him as my best friend, *and also* get to make cool stuff with him, whether it fails or not! The way that we joke around and interact together gets deeply integrated into anything that we work on—it's impossible to separate those two things. Every fart joke and dumb mouth sound effect. It's in there. It's like we're family. My mom calls him the son she'd never had. Because we love what we do and adore each other, it's a great combo for making stuff.

There were all-new challenges to face. Jhonen and crew couldn't just pick up where they last left off and do the same thing as before. The very idea of making a single feature-length story versus a series of shorts is vastly different. Writing isn't an automated process in which X time spent equals Y words produced, and what works for eleven minutes does not work for sixty-six. The movie script could not simply be a stack of six eleven-minute *Zim* episodes.

Jhonen Vasquez [series creator]: This special was the most ironed-out, heavily outlined thing we've done. We spent an entire year outlining and writing the script. And like the series, it kept changing up until even the very last second. It was the most planning I have ever done, which was interesting but also kind of miserable. I can't stand not having a nice cushion of free-forming. I knew everything that was going to happen in this script too far ahead of time. I prefer to have a little bit of freedom to just play around.

When he heard that *Zim* was to be revived at Nickelodeon, Breehn Burns, a fan of the original series, leapt at the chance to join in the fray. He had, after all, made a promise to himself that he would work on *Zim* one day after seeing a VHS tape of the pilot at Nickelodeon's offices in New York, back in 2001. After his dreams were immediately crushed by *Zim*'s cancellation, he somehow found the strength to soldier on. In 2016, older and wiser, and with significant writer/director experience under his belt on other shows like *Bravest Warriors*, Breehn began the long journey of *Zim* movie development with Jhonen in endless coffee-shop writing sessions.

Breehn Burns [supervising producer]: The big question was, "Can *Invader Zim* sustain a feature-length format?" Followed closely by, "How much screaming is too much screaming?" and "Is this going to be too much for people, because eleven minutes was just about perfect?" [*laughs*] I can't say that we arrived at some perfect alchemy. We paid more attention to themes, arriving at a theme of fatherhood and seeking out father figures. For the first time, even if it's just for a second, you get a little bit of a bond between Zim and Dib, because they're both on the same journey of feeling rejected by their father figures. Finding threads that could sustain a story like that was important. We needed to find a bigger character journey for the two main characters.

A character journey for inflexibly rigid characters can present even more challenges.

Jhonen: Zim is completely unchanged in terms of what he was—there's just not a lot to him. You can't do a whole lot to Zim. He's incredibly single-minded, not the deepest character at all. That's kind of the whole point of him: He's absolutely oblivious to any of his own flaws. He's the best, and everyone else is inferior, and he just screams a lot. But for the special, there had to be some ups and downs.

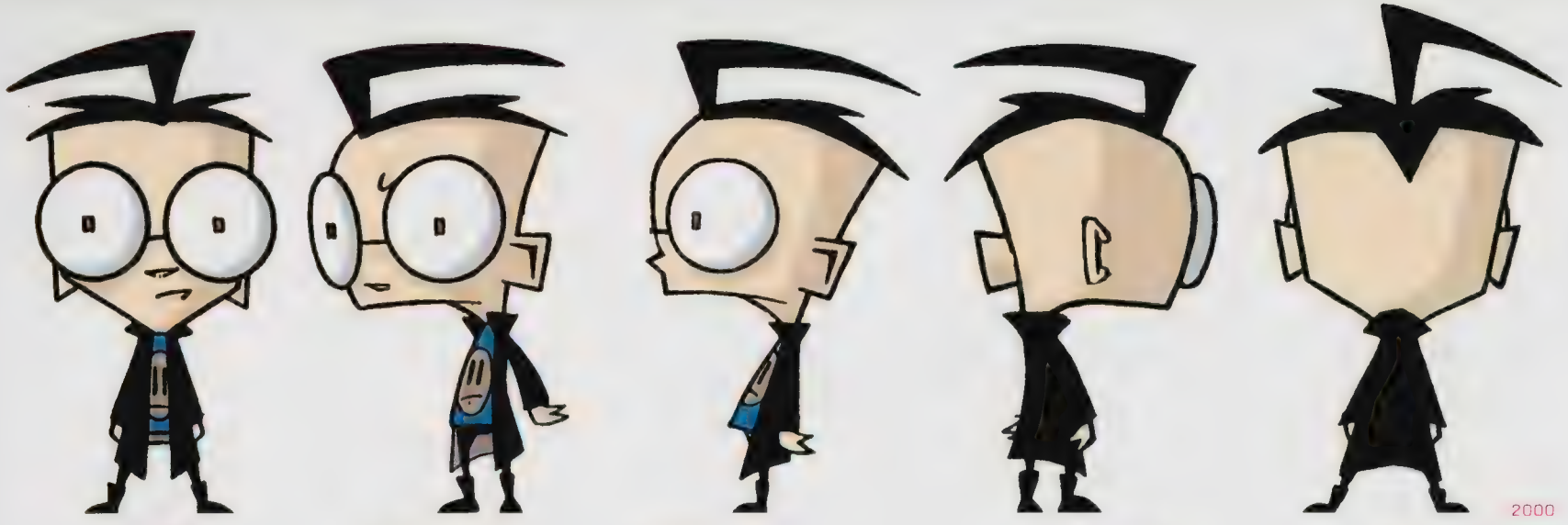
Breehn: Jhonen designed the characters for comedic purposes. They're so stupid and so self-important, and so determined to succeed and totally un-self-aware. We had meetings where we would just sit in cafés and restaurants over the months writing the outline and the script, and one of the things that I was encouraging Jhonen to find were new places for the characters to go. And it's hard to do that because they're not designed to go new places.

Jhonen: Zim has his own form of emotional low, but Dib probably got the most in terms of having an actual character arc. I'm hesitant to actually say "character development," because *Zim*, the show, has never been about developing [*laughs*] or progressing; they're just trapped in this perpetual anger and frustration. For the special, I think we dealt with it in a way that feels like the show. It doesn't feel like a huge departure.

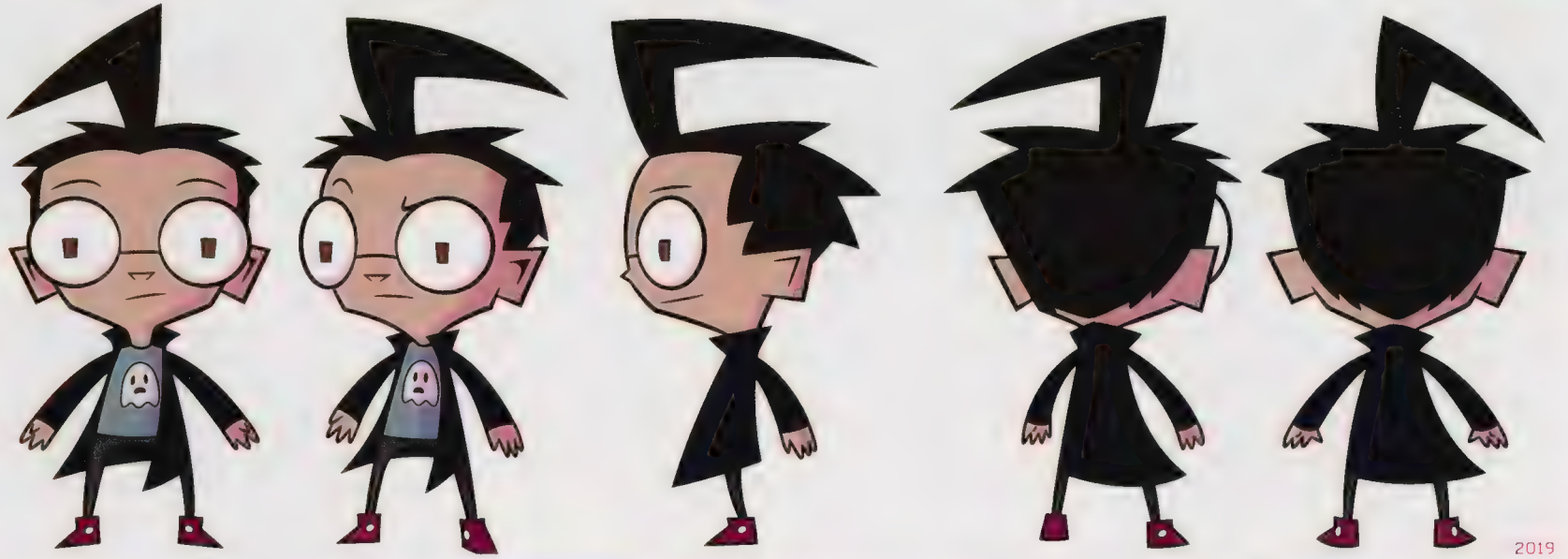
Breehn: Part of what Jhonen wanted me to do was to help him find a slightly more emotionally connected family dynamic for the characters. We tried not to go overboard with it, but we gave Gaz an arc where she finally has to be like, "I love my brother," [*laughs*] which is something that she would never say out loud. Early on Zim hits his low point, but then we get to Dib's low point when he realizes that everything

(Continued on page 210)

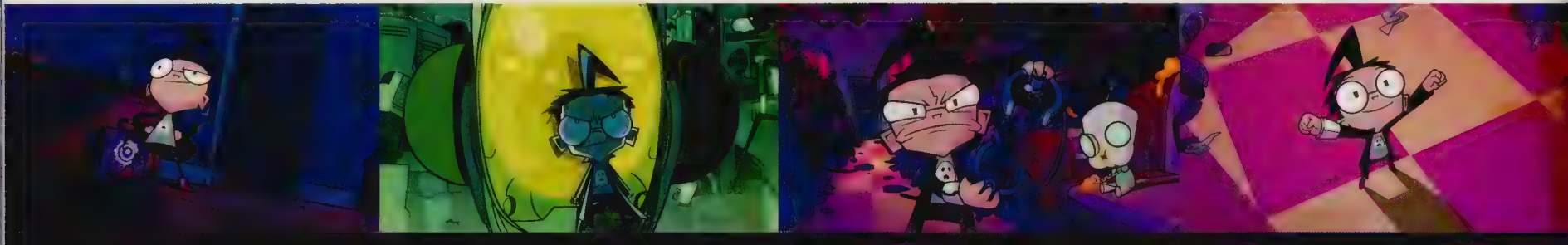
This spread: Four backgrounds show Zim's house in various lighting conditions and weather, illustrating the power of color design to change mood.



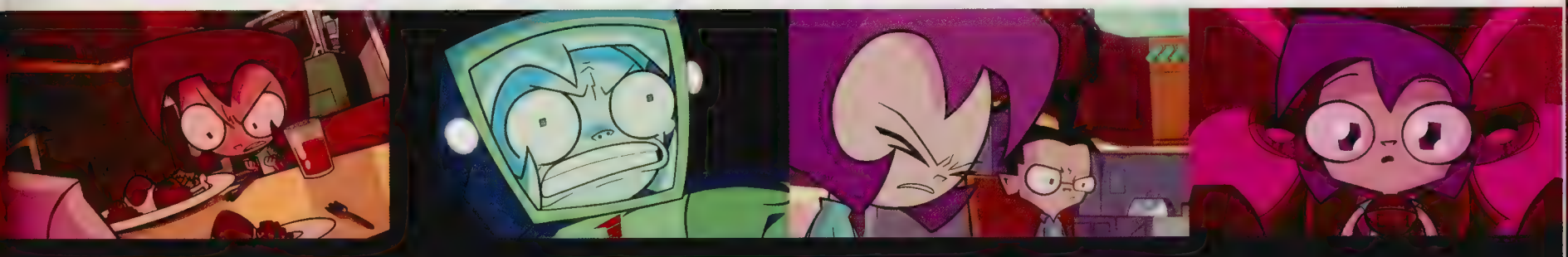
2000



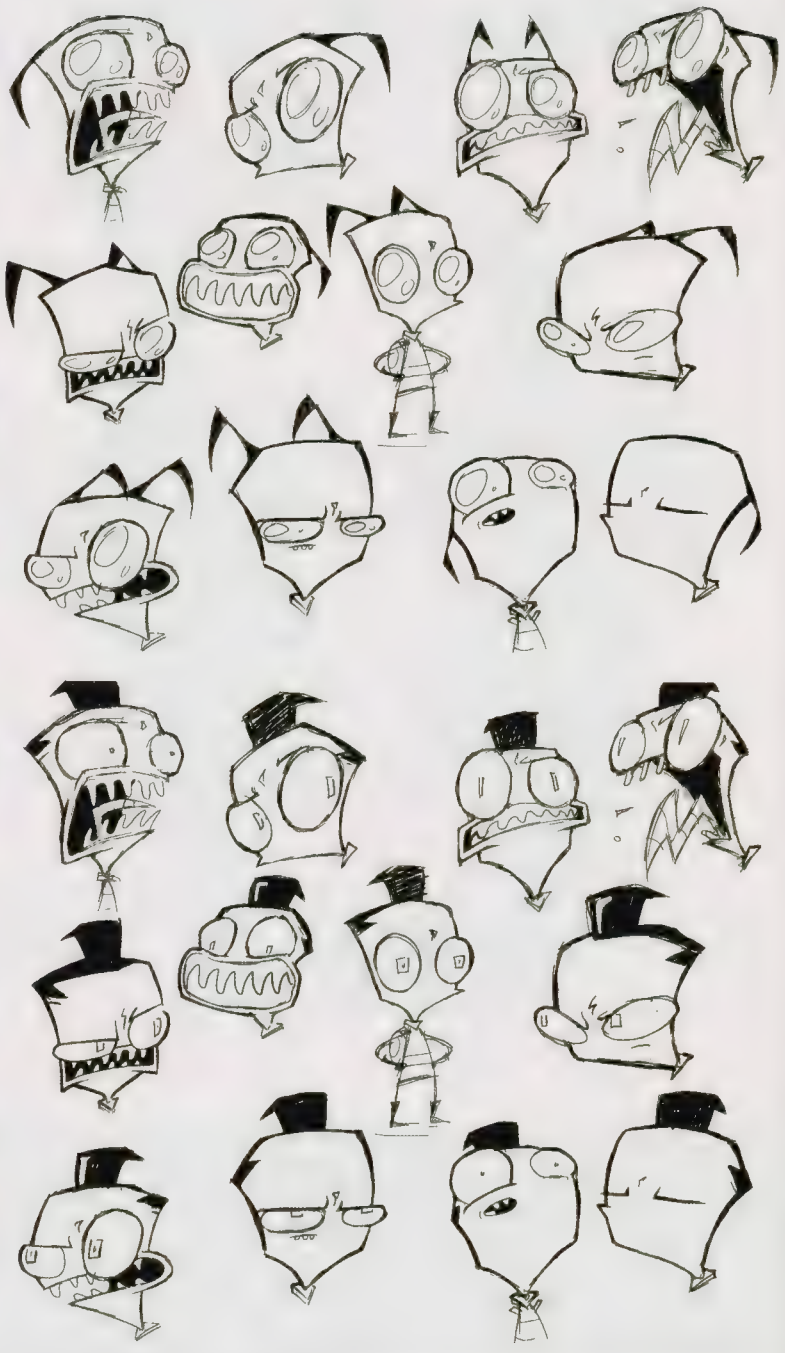
2019



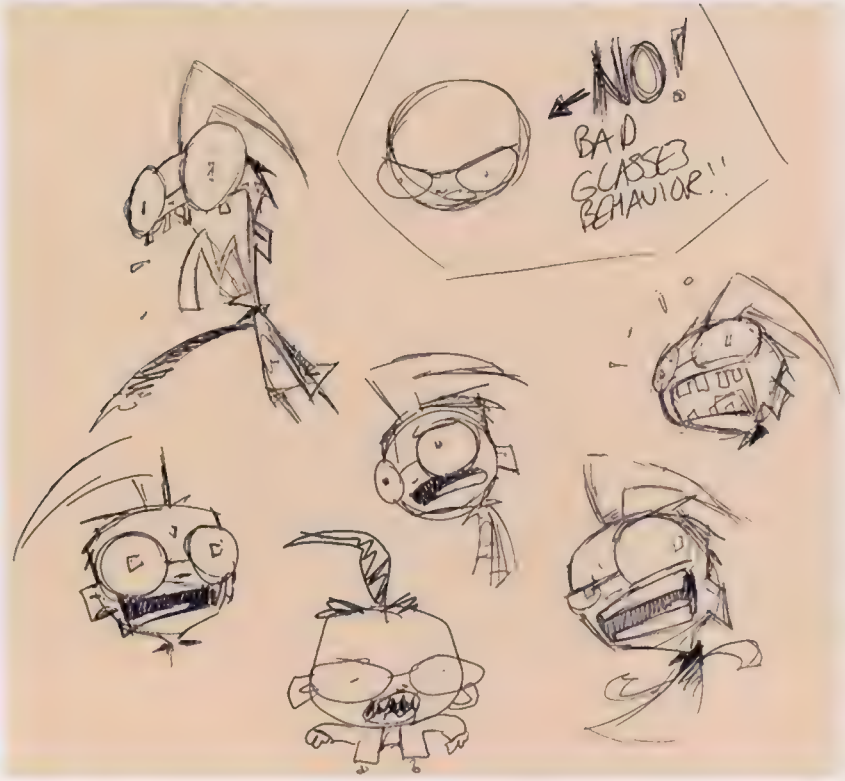
CHARACTER DESIGN

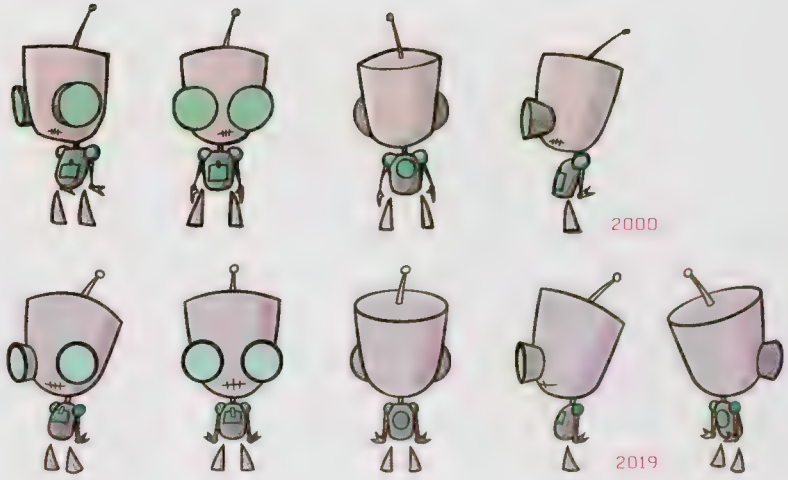


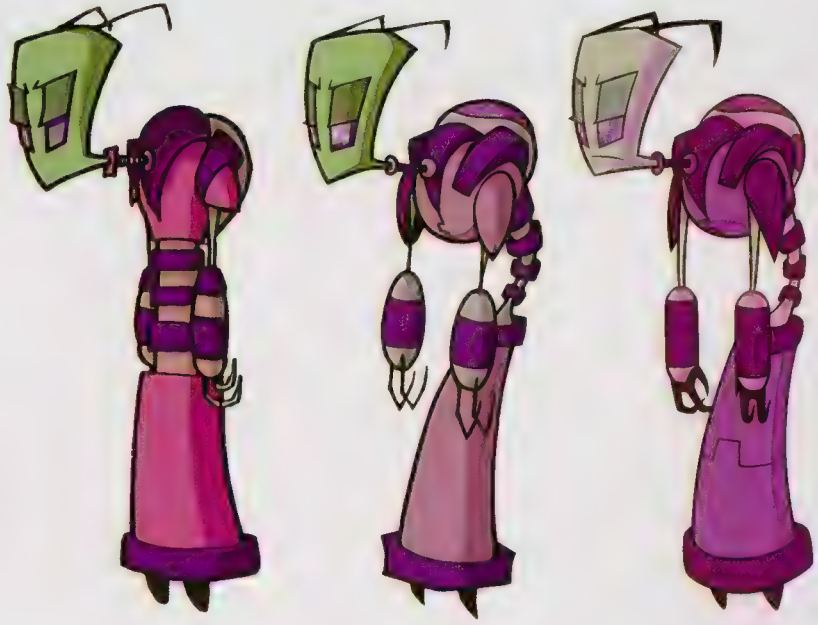
This spread: Character turnarounds of Dib and Gaz showing off their revised 2019 *Florpus*-era designs beneath their original 2000 series-era designs for comparison, along with some stills from *Florpus*. Also above are some Gaz expressions by Jhonen for the movie.



CHARACTER DESIGN







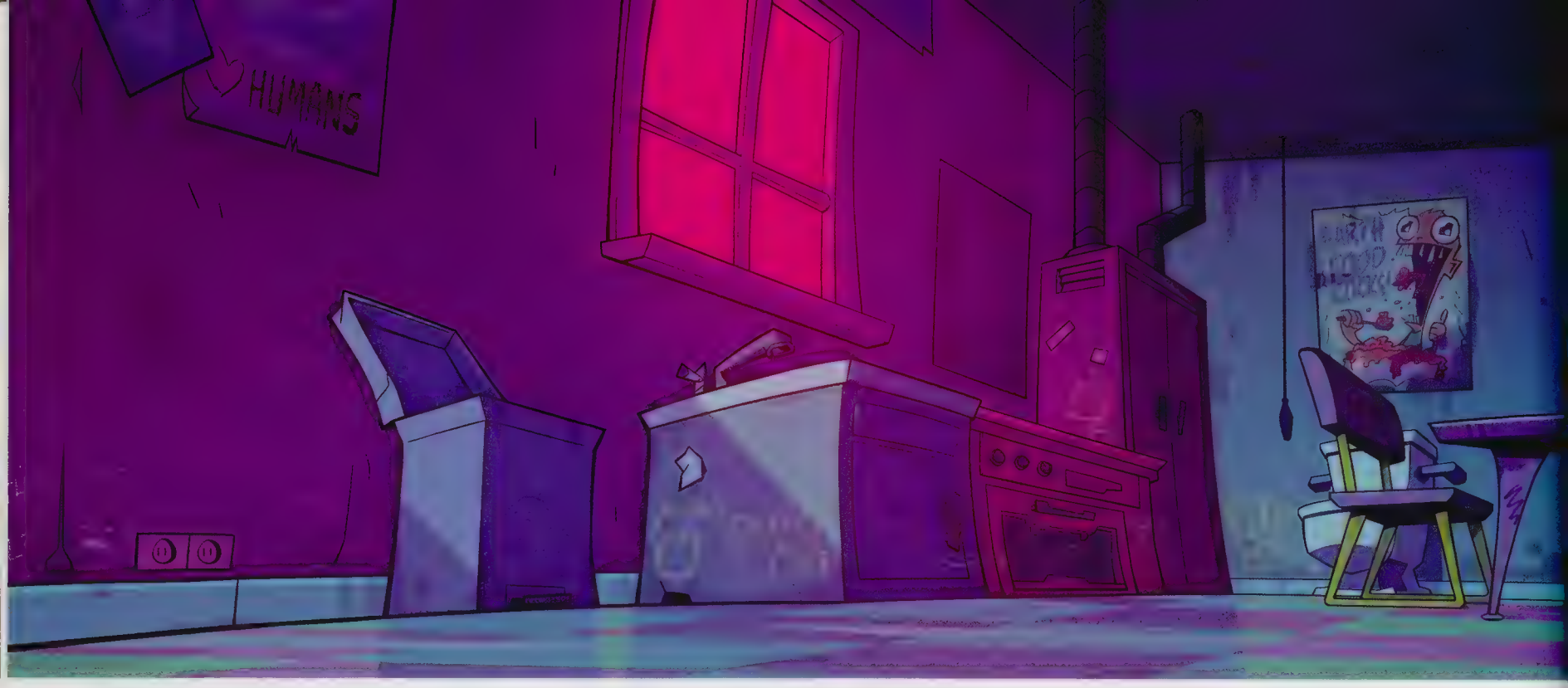
jhnenvee
Seoul, South Korea

4,461 likes

jhnenvee The overseas animators asked for me to do drawings of the main characters making different expressions as examples of how I personally draw them, so I started with this guy. Because ZIM's emotional spectrum is so narrow, he's always been easier to pull off for people so, even if he's being drawn somewhat off, he's still funny. Dib's always been trickier as he has somewhat more territory as a character to cover: he can be as wild eyed as ZIM, but there's more self awareness in him so where ZIM is just clueless and funny, Dib can come off as just off-putting and abrasive. His expressions are a huge part of reeling him back towards being funny but also, hopefully more sympathetic while not steering too hard into insincere seeming vulnerability. Dib's a jerk for sure, but he's still just a kid, and I've always been very sensitive to drawings that don't contain both aspects in the right proportions.

This spread: Character turnarounds of Zim and Gir showing off their revised 2019 *Florpus*-era designs beneath their original 2000 series-era designs for comparison.

Above: A social media post Jhonen created while visiting the Korean animation studio, with rough Dib sketches and insight into his efforts to find the right blend of expression in the designs. Also above, a comparison of the Tallest's evolutionary stages from 2000, 2001, and 2019.



that has happened is essentially his fault. His sister has to kind of actually back him up, and pick him up off his feet and say, "We're going to get through this." Which, you know, for Gaz, that's a Hallmark Moment. It's unheard of for her. I think she's one of everybody's favorite characters, and it's cool to see her stretch a little bit.

From the opening scenes of the movie, the audience is trusted to jump on board quickly. There is no time to be wasted on excessive backstory.

Jhonen: It's important to not take too much too time to introduce new viewers to the characters in a way where it's like, reestablishing the story, the origins and all that. One of my favorite things growing up was coming home and putting on *Inspector Gadget*. I didn't know what *Inspector Gadget* was. I'd never seen it, I'd never heard of it. I just turned on the TV, and it had been running for a while, but it didn't matter. I just knew that this character was an idiot, and he had these sidekicks that were smarter than him. And his enemy was some weird dude. It didn't matter that I had no clue what the history of this was. I just instantly liked it. So the special takes the attitude of, "We're not going to tell you who these characters are." There's a little bit of catch-up, there's a few seconds of "Zim's an alien, he's on Urth . . ." but I didn't want to waste time.

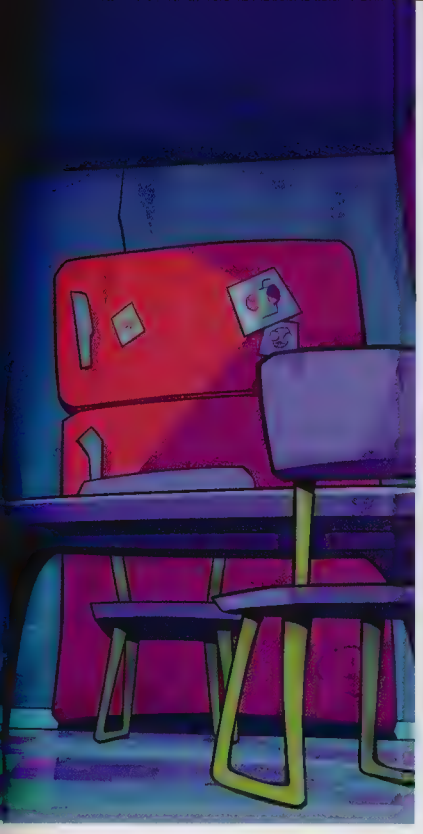
I figure that their personalities are strong enough that you know that this one's the idiot, and that one's the other idiot. And this one's the *other* other idiot. And they're both kind of the bad guy, and they're both kind of the good guy. The special doesn't work too hard to get you up to speed. It starts off entertaining and hopefully continues being entertaining whether or not you know the history.

Zim, Gaz, and Dib's designs had evolved in the comics, and were codified with new model sheets for the movie. Professor Membrane was reimagined as well.

Jhonen: I came close to putting a moment in where something blows Membrane's coat back, and you see his legs, and they go up really high up–like his torso is incredibly short, but we didn't do it! I know. [*laughs*] You think he's this big strapping superman, but he's really all legs.

He's pretty redesigned. I think he looks more like what I wanted him to be in the first place. For some reason in the series he ended up getting sort of streamlined. He was kind of like a string bean man. He never really exuded power. In this movie, he looks like a superhero. He's the world's most famous scientist and TV star, and I wanted him to look impossible. He's like everything Dib isn't. Dib isn't

Above: Under art director Jenny Goldberg's guidance, *Florpus* background art has an advanced sense of atmospheric space, partly due to the carefully painted gradated light diffusing through the interiors.



huge, he's not strapping, he's not powerful-looking–and his dad is just this god. So Membrane's designed way blockier. He's wider, and he's more powerfully planted on the ground. He's a huge part of the special.

The color theories and background design evolved as well, in an extension of the work already completed on the comics.

Jhonen: The new stuff, there's more atmosphere in the movie. Which is weird in a sense. Because when I think of *Zim*, the target look for *Zim* was always very simple. Like *The Simpsons*. Or *Futurama*. Just, cel-shaded [flat colors enclosed with line-art, like a classic cartoon frame painted on celluloid], not a lot of gradients, not a lot of atmosphere; it was all comic-stark. But the movie looks almost like concept art.

By the time we got to working on the special, we had a pretty good idea of how we were going to approach it. It was still with the idea of keeping the world as this hyper, vivid, toxic place. Radioactive greens, burning reds and fuchsias, the effect of flashing a light through a gel in a dark room . . . burning through the screen in these hotspots. The classic example would be Zim's windows–those hot, red, beacons. Blood-red skies.

We had to do a thing in the special where we couldn't have blood-red skies for most of the movie because the third act is the apocalyptic part, so we needed contrast with that beforehand. So we had to settle on using a normal blue sky. That was hard to adapt to.

Normalcy? In a *Zim* cartoon? Another symptom of the feature length considerations: having to set up a sense of calm and stability in order to contrast with and destroy that while building to the climax.

Jhonen: The special is less preoccupied with how filthy the world is. The story just wasn't focused on that. After two or three years of working on this one story, it gets frustrating because you can't help but want to tell another story. Now I want to do everything that this story *doesn't* do. Now I want to do horror! And gross stuff.

The series was full of a bunch of people who were huge horror and science fiction people. The movie special? Not so much, in terms of the horror element especially. That element on the new crew was greatly diminished. I would make references to the crew and discover, "You've never seen *Gremlins*?" or even, "You've never seen . . . *a horror movie*?!"

(Continued on page 214)

Above: Stills from *Florpus* featuring the newly designed powerful proportions of Professor Membrane.

This spread: Background art from *Enter the Florpus*.

DATA

Even the horror-deprived animation professionals on the *Zim* crew have seen movies, however, of many varieties, textures, and tones. With the expanded emotional tone the new movie demanded, this wide spectrum of influence and experience was useful. Jake Wyatt, for example brought his own knack for action comics and action storyboarding to the team, which proved helpful for some of the high-octane sequences in the movie.

Jake Wyatt [storyboard supervisor]: In terms of story, not just camera work, the major deviation this movie is from the series is that it is a story. The series was great, but the series was *Spy vs. Spy*. You had Dib and Zim, who were both awful idiots, and they would punish each other, and that was the series. It was awesome, and it worked really well, but it was eleven minutes for them to antagonize each other and then punish each other in surprising ways.

This is a story about relationships and desires and insecurities and family, so part of selling all of that emotional depth is that the camera has more work to do when we storyboard it. In contrast, part of what made the series so fun is that there were no emotional stakes. The camera was free to do whatever was most interesting visually. On *Florpus*, the camera gets conscripted to the cause of the story a lot more often. Within that, we still try to be as *Zim*-y as we can. There are moments where we mimic horror, there are moments when we try to create a sense of awe and magic—something I don't think they tried to do on the show. Not just scale, but beauty. We go to space, and space is sometimes horrifying, and space is sometimes silly and stupid, and space is sometimes beautiful. I feel like that wasn't present in the show—things were either horrifying or funny. So we've added a little additional dimension. It's a lot of what you like from the show. But there will be more added to it, more emotional breadth and depth.

Chris Viscardi [Executive Producer, Nickelodeon]: There is a very relatable, and oddly touching emotional story for both Zim and Dib: They both want to be seen and heard and admired by a parental figure. For Dib, it's his own father. For Zim, it's the Tallest. And that emotional pull, that relatable kid-parent dynamic, works for fans of any age.

By virtue of its unique history, *Zim* is re-invading pop culture at a distinctly different societal juncture than that in which it originally aired close to twenty years before.

Jhonen: I wonder about this special because it's a weird time for it to come out. It's not how cartoons for kids generally are right now–things are a lot more positive. There's a lot of positive shows out there that I absolutely love, and they're far more emotionally open than *Zim* ever was, but *Zim* was never supposed to be that. It was always supposed to be cruel and vindictive–not because the lesson was that the audience should be cruel and vindictive, as it kind of assumes that you know better. That's why this stuff is funny. You laugh at this because you're *not* supposed to act like this. Zim's horrible! Dib's horrible! They're not presented as role models. They're kind of back in the *Beavis and Butt-Head* days. There was all this controversy about how terrible *Beavis and Butt-Head* was, but I never thought that the point of the show was, "Hey, be like Beavis and Butt-Head, be like these awful people." It's like, "Here are some people to laugh at! Laugh at these awful, awful people."

So with this special coming out when things are perhaps vastly more sensitive, to a terrifying degree, I don't know where it belongs.

I would also think that *Zim*, now . . . it's not as funny! [*laughs*] It's not as funny. It's not as funny now as it used to be because it's not really parody any more. You can't really parody reality in the same way anymore because not only has reality gone further than what *Zim* does, but it's alarming and depressing. All the same, I don't think it should mean we should shy away from telling ugly stories and mean stories.

It's one of the first things I was thinking about when I was asked to come up with some more *Zim* stuff. We'll see how it goes! It's an ugly time for ugly things.

Zim, Dib, et al., never really went away; they aren't appearing out of a void. Besides living in Jhonen's head, the characters also lived on in reruns, DVD collections, and in the comic book series. The fans remained, and new generations of fans were spawned. *Zim* has been simmering all this time, much like "gross-Dib" (crew shorthand for Dib's disgusting model design) has been festering in his bedroom, waiting for revenge. Which is where both the stories in the comics series and the new movie begin.

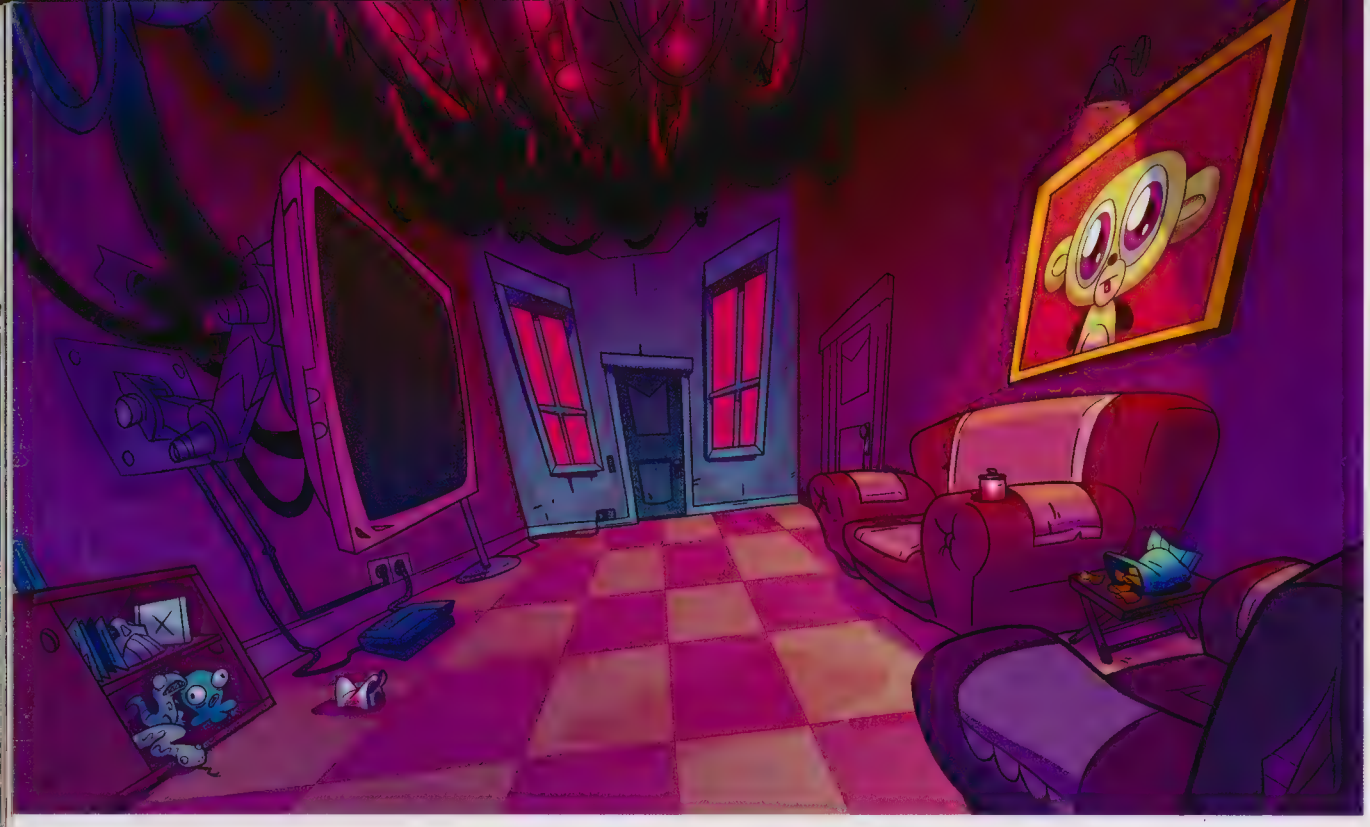
Animated series that enjoy a long run on television always evolve over time. Designs from one season can seem like ancient relics two seasons later. Character personalities shift, sometimes developing nuanced layers, sometimes calcifying into diminishing echoes of the original. But these evolutions happen gradually over many seasons. Without the benefit of much time before being canceled, *Zim*'s revival could have been designed

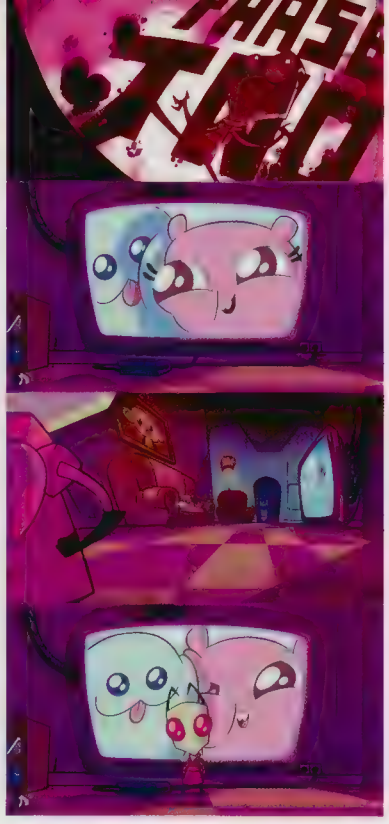
(Continued on page 218)

This spread: This horizontal pan background is designed to create a multi-plane effect when moved past the animation software's "camera." The foreground layer passes more rapidly through the space creating depth with a parallax effect.

STORYBOARD THUMBNAILS

This spread: To conceptualize the action, storyboard supervisor Jake Wyatt created tiny thumbnails of sequences (opposite) before moving on to fully realized storyboard panels for a chase sequence (above).





to cater to the nostalgia that the dedicated fanbase had harbored for almost two decades by faithfully re-creating the original short-lived run in movie form. Or another approach might have been the reboot: an explicit reimagining of everything, typically granted a "cool" modern edge.

Jhonen: Honestly, how we approached this special is that this is just a continuation. It's not a reboot, it's just: "Here's more!" I didn't want it to feel like "Hey, here's some nostalgia!" because I generally can't stand that. These characters have existed in my head since the show went off the air, and this is me just picking it back up—it's not me saying, "All right world, here's the new *Zim*!" Instead, it's like, "Here's the old stuff, it just looks cooler"—hopefully.

Kind of like the comics, I want the general effect to be that the special is what the series would be now if it had never gone off the air. This is what it has naturally become.

Chris Viscardi: People often ask why we decided to make a movie instead of new episodes, and to me it came down to wanting to elevate the characters and world of *Invader Zim* by telling a bigger story. The original series always felt bigger than the half-hour box it was squeezed into. So why not take the shackles off and let Jhonen's imagination and his adorably deviant cast of idiots run wild for the length of a movie? That sounded like a good idea to me. And happily, Jhonen agreed.

Jenny: I'm hoping fans will see it's just characters that were already brilliant and stupid and funny in all the right ways, and that we've expanded upon them and given them more dimension. We explore Dib's relationship with his dad a lot. Jhonen will shoot me for saying that it has more heart than the series ever did, but it totally does. The series was a lot more overtly mean-spirited, which I think was part of its charm, but this movie proves that you can have that mean-spiritedness but also have some genuine love in there. Not just the love of the characters but the love of the way this movie was made. This whole team loved this, we all put our whole selves into it. I think we've been able to make a more heart-filled, more saturated and rich version of what was already there. And this is coming from someone who absolutely adores the original series—I grew up on it.

Wisdom: Achieved

Jhonen has straddled the lives of an independent comics artist and of a big animation-studio producer; he's experienced the trials of carving out a living as a visual

Above: Background artowrk of Zim's house and stills from *Florpus*.

storyteller. The long, strange journey of Zim—from development through his television-movie debut—has produced several career's worth of substantive lessons, and illustrates that there is no single path to getting projects produced. Like so many essential organs from schoolchildren, here are some of those lessons from Jhonen and Zim's story that may be harvested:

1. Show Me the Work

Jhonen's early path to professional success has something in common with others who have also risen to prominence in comics and animation: a steady output of work. Work that shows potential for growth and the drive to keep creating it. Work that says to the world that this artist will be making art with or without a publishing or development deal, because they cannot be stopped. Any publisher or producer will have their eyes on an artist's recent efforts. Evidence that an artist is living and breathing their artistic calling is very convincing.

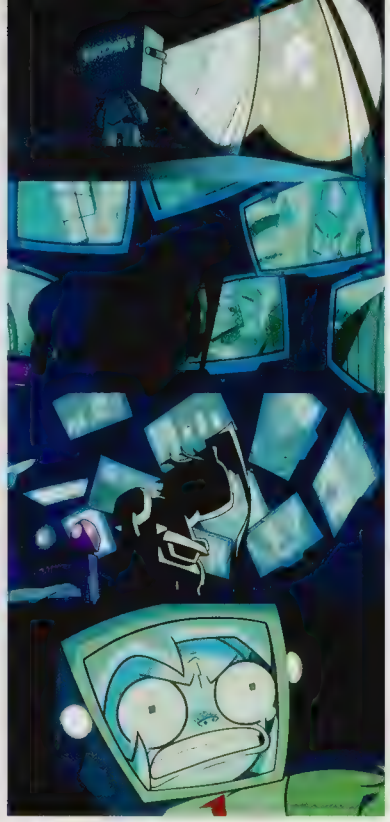
2. Feed Your Voice

Working hard is not always enough. It takes a unique voice to rise above the masses and gain the attention of potential creative partners. In Jhonen's case, his voice was built from a foundation of obsessing over animation and film, then making comics. His varied influences set his work apart, as did his self-taught art style. Having a similarly broad and ever-deepening pool of influences can make an artist textured and unexpected, and like Jhonen, set them apart from the crowd.

3. Discover Your Favorite Process

Jhonen's story illustrates that toiling alone in a home studio has its advantages: lax dress code, schedule autonomy, easy commute from bed to desk. Freelancing from home also often means being your own boss—sure to appeal to many creative minds. This scenario is also full of pitfalls for the type of person who is easily distracted, or prone to anxiously overworking. Working in a big studio, alternatively, offers pluses, too: free snacks, normalized hours, and human interaction. That last point is a big one. Many creative pursuits thrive through collaboration with others. Collaborating with a team will also create work with a finished, polished look and scope that is impossible to achieve alone. Jhonen's experience with both scenarios allow him insight into what parts of each make him happiest: the ability to play, improvise, and collaborate with others who are also enthusiastic or having a good time. Discover what working scenarios make you the happiest and then design projects around those processes.

Above: Stills from an in-progress version of the *Enter the Florpus* opening title animation, and rotations of a Bloaty head design.



4. The Process is the Point

Stories from the *Zim* series crew, comics, and movie productions remind us that for the artists behind the scenes, the experience of creating is paramount. Later, the debut, the premiere, the publishing, opening, posting, or sharing with the world is just dessert: a dopamine-rush of anticipation hopefully followed by ego-stroking (or sometimes pummeling). It's thrilling, but it isn't the point—play, process, and the work itself is.

5. Inner Kid First

Recalling childhood obsessions can be a good way to focus and hone the imaginations of aspiring artists. Through analysis of the movies, books, and games that they love and have loved since childhood, artists should consider how they might use the same stylistic and thematic elements from those works to evoke those similar emotions and experiences via their own work. Jhonen's work connects with others naturally—no focus testing needed. A bonus is that by using themes and motifs that are foundational to an artist's creative development, their work will continue to engage their own enthusiasm. Jhonen's work works because it explores real childhood fears and obsessions. These ideas have deep roots.

The Idea Spew

Jhonen: *Zim* doesn't really have any logical conclusion. It can exist for as long as we can come up with ideas for it, and I don't think we're anywhere near done coming up with ideas.

Jenny: Jhonen is a creative juggernaut. He'll be on the toilet, and he'll come out with five new ideas, and I'll be like, "WHAT? HOW?!" They just fall out of him, it's ridiculous. No one should have that much power. [*laughs*]

As long as Jhonen keeps spewing out ideas, *Zim*'s themes and tone are inevitably going to be out there, because he can't help but infuse these themes of stupidity and extraterrestrials and living houses into his work. He loves these things, and they just get into everything that he does. Whether or not *Zim* lives on, the themes will be there in Jhonen's future.

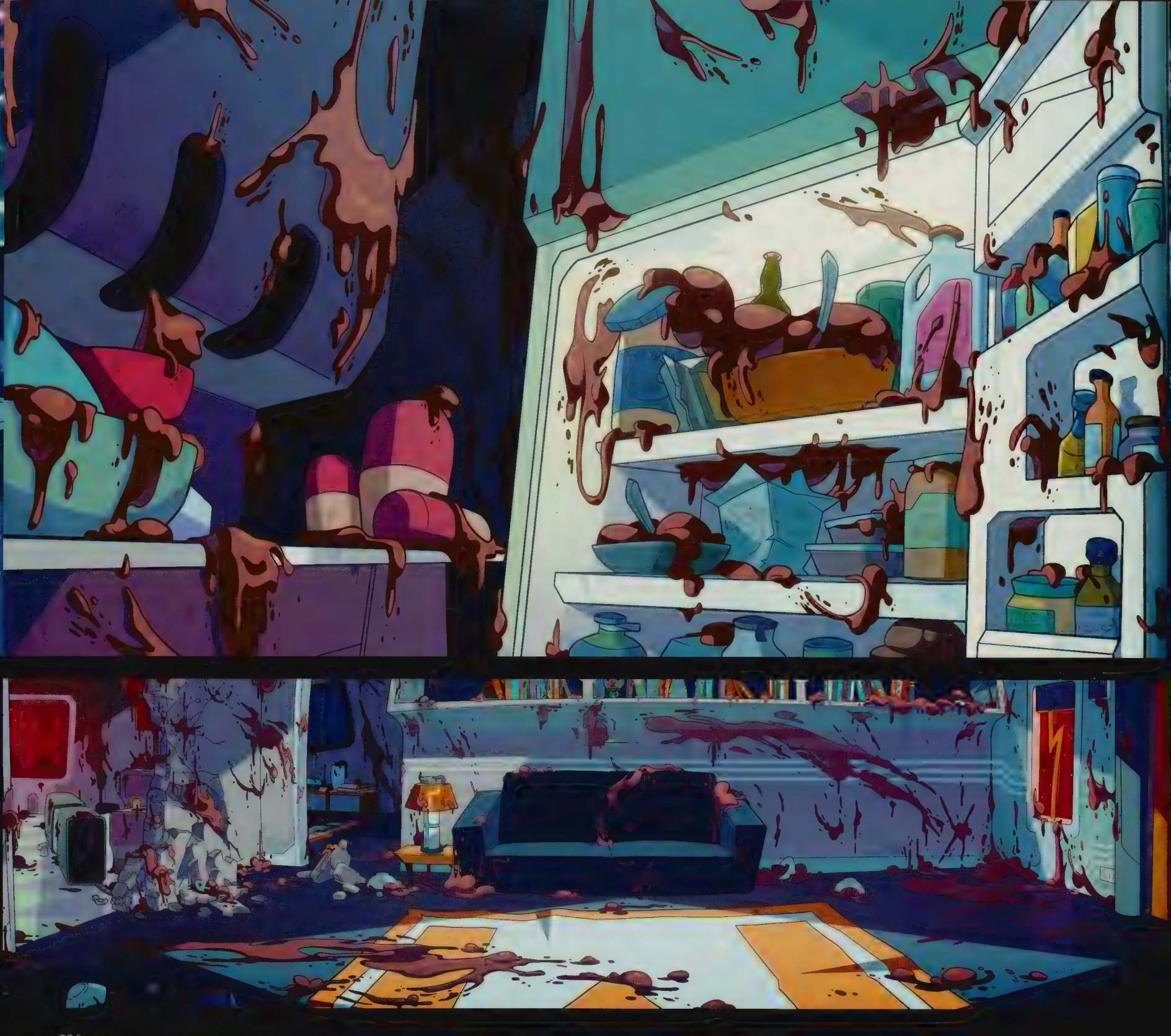
Jhonen: *Zim* is just a repository for all of these ideas, all of these fascinations and obsessions that I still have mainly from being a kid. I don't know if that's what resonates with people, I haven't investigated what people relate to. But so much of that stuff comes from things that I thought were funny a long, long time ago. Being a little kid and laughing at things that I thought were interesting . . . and now they are my life!

Above: Background art of Dib's bedroom and stills from *Florpus*.

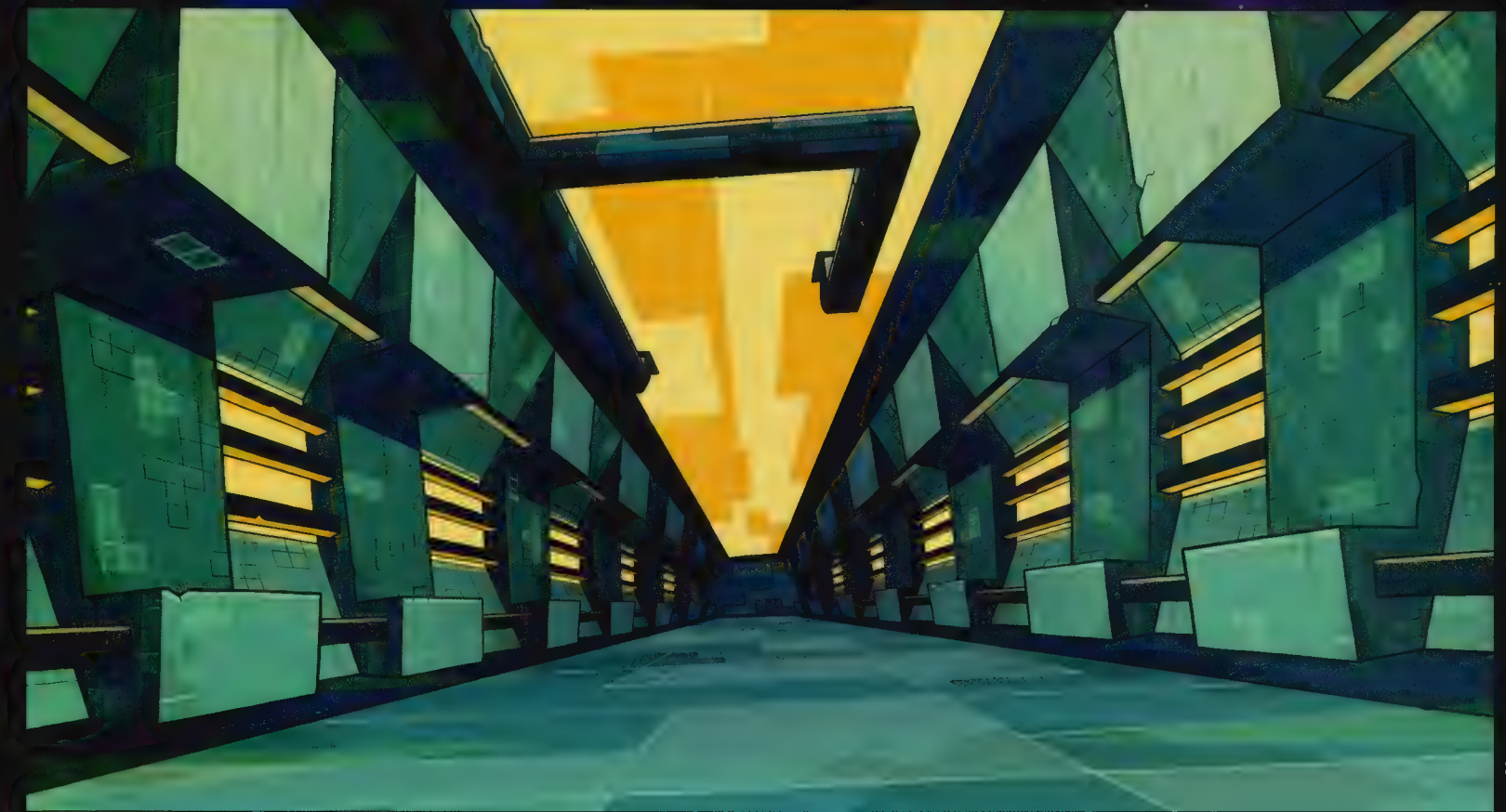
Opposite: Background art from *Florpus*.

this spread and overleaf Background art from *Enter the Florpus*.

WELCAM TALLITS
DIS WAY
HI TALLITS

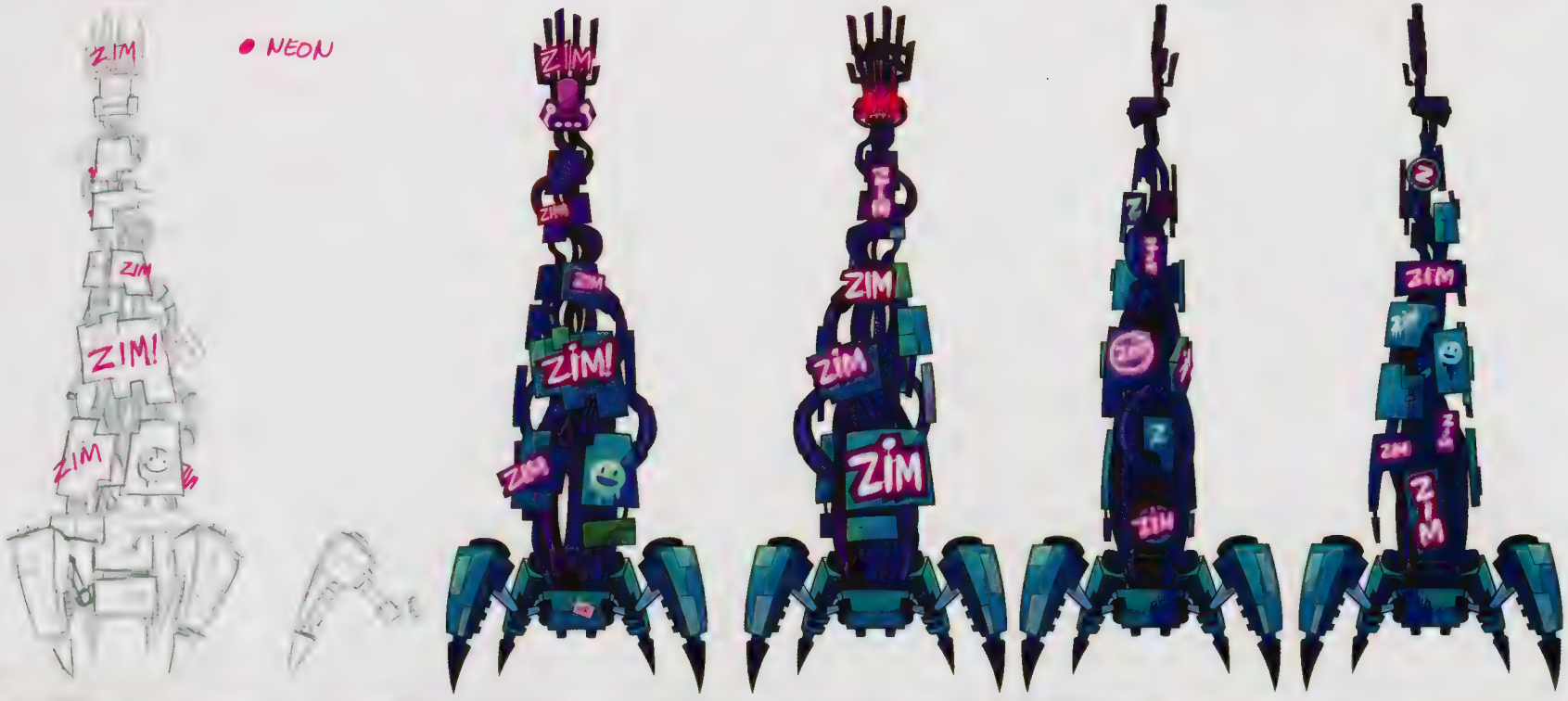


PRISON



This screen: Background art from *Enter the Florpus.*

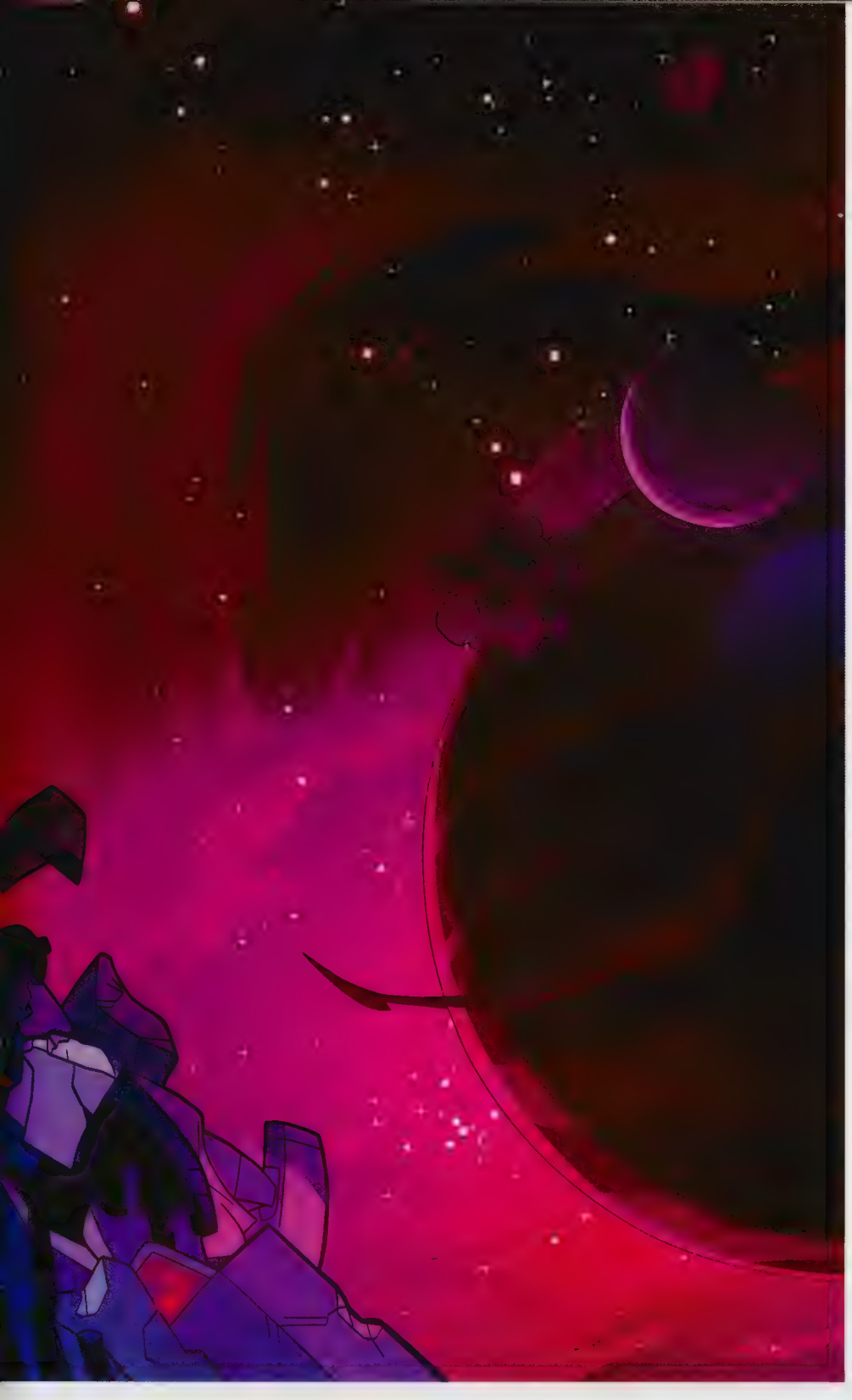
PRISON SPACE VERSION

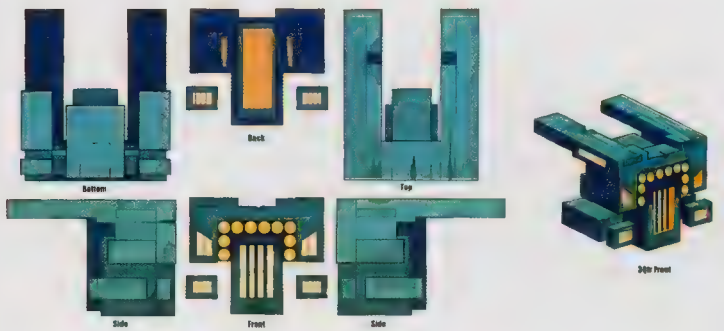


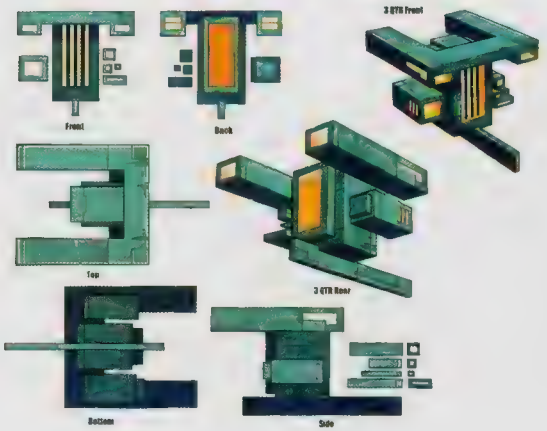
PROP DESIGNS

Above: A Jhonen sketch (far left) and the prop model that was designed based off it.

This spread: Various prop designs from *Enter the Florpus*.







This spread: Background art and various prop designs from *Enter the Florpus.*

This spread: Background art and stills from *Enter the Florpus*.

Overleaf: The chaotic climax of *Enter the Florpus*.

SAVE
WORLD
4/N

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S. Scott Bullock
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Dwight Schultz
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Arthur Montmorency

"GAME SLAVE 2" STORY IDEA BY
Roman Dirge

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Hollywood Animals
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Kyungmi Wu
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Taeok Lee
Myeongok Park
Jungmin Park
Sooin Park
Eunji Seong
Youngsuk Sin
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Renegade Animation
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PRODUCTION MANAGER
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EXECUTIVE PRODUCER
Ashley Postlewaite
"PEACE IS NICE"
MUSIC BY
Jhonen Vasquez
Kevin Manthei
LYRICS BY
Jhonen Vasquez
PERFORMED BY THE TRIUMPH CHILDREN'S CHOIR
Honor Manthei
Keller Manthei
Piper Manthei
Emma Patti
Luke Patti
Noah Patti
ELECTRIC AND BASS GUITAR
Nick Soole
MANDOLIN
James Schafer
"FLIBBA DIBBA HOINKA SMEEDGE" MUSIC BY
Jimmy Urine
LYRICS BY
Jhonen Vasquez
TRACK READING SERVICES
Slightly Off Track, Inc.
SHEET TIMER
Michelle Bryan
FINAL CHECKER
Michelle Bryan
MAIN TITLE DESIGN & ANIMATION
Jermz Gallardo
Ami Goff
Jenny Goldberg
Chris Graham
Christian Maize
Jhonen Vasquez
SUPERVISING PICTURE EDITOR
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POST PRODUCTION SUPERVISOR
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Kate Finan, MPSE
ADDITIONAL RE-RECORDING MIXER
Jacob Cook
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Warner Bros. Post Production Creative Services
TELECINE COLORIST
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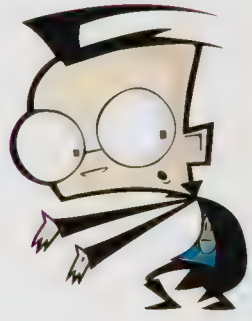

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Production Manager: Michael Kaserkie

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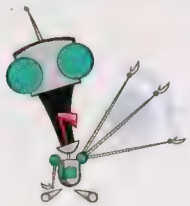
—Chris McDonnell, Philadelphia, June 2019



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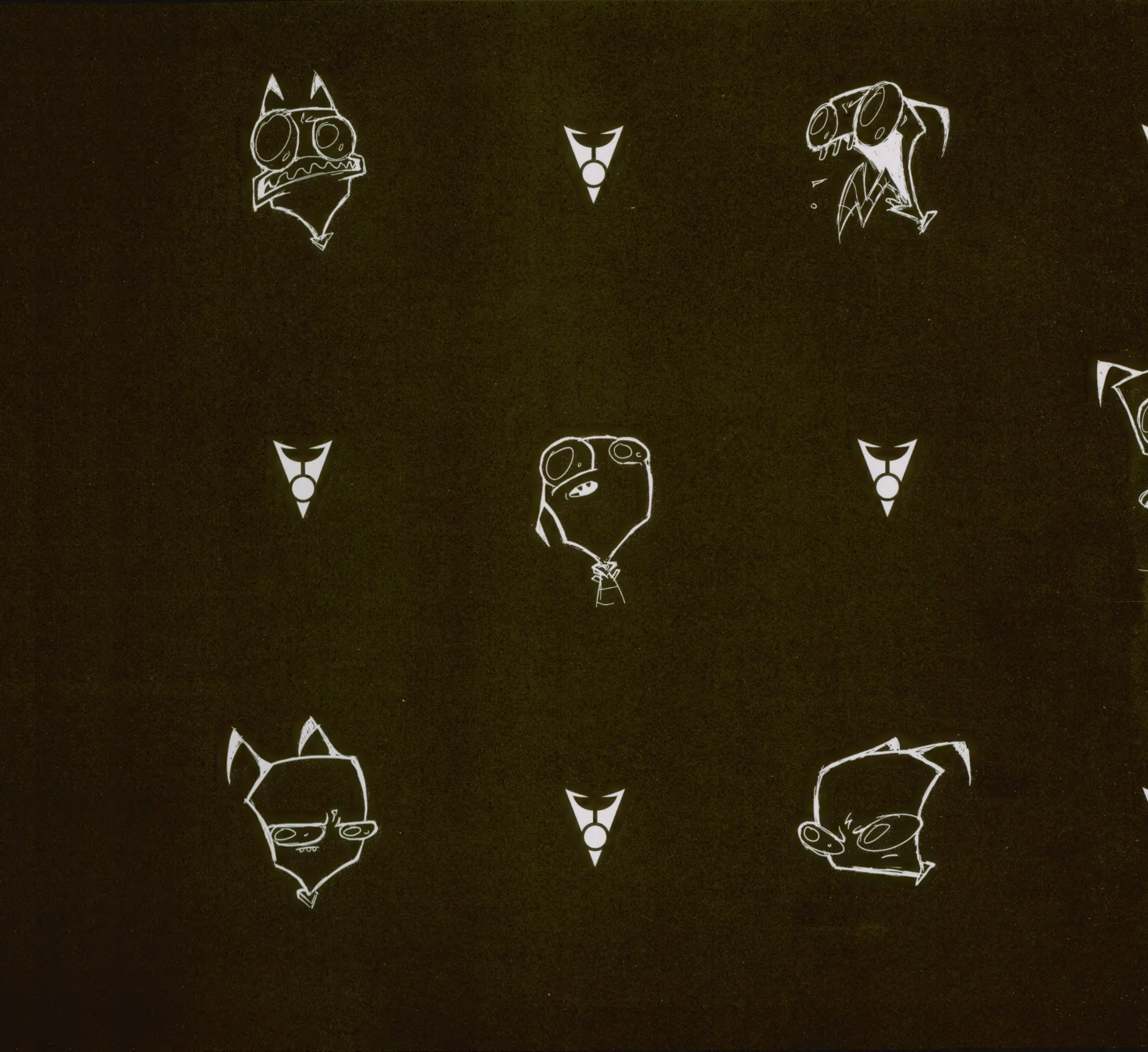

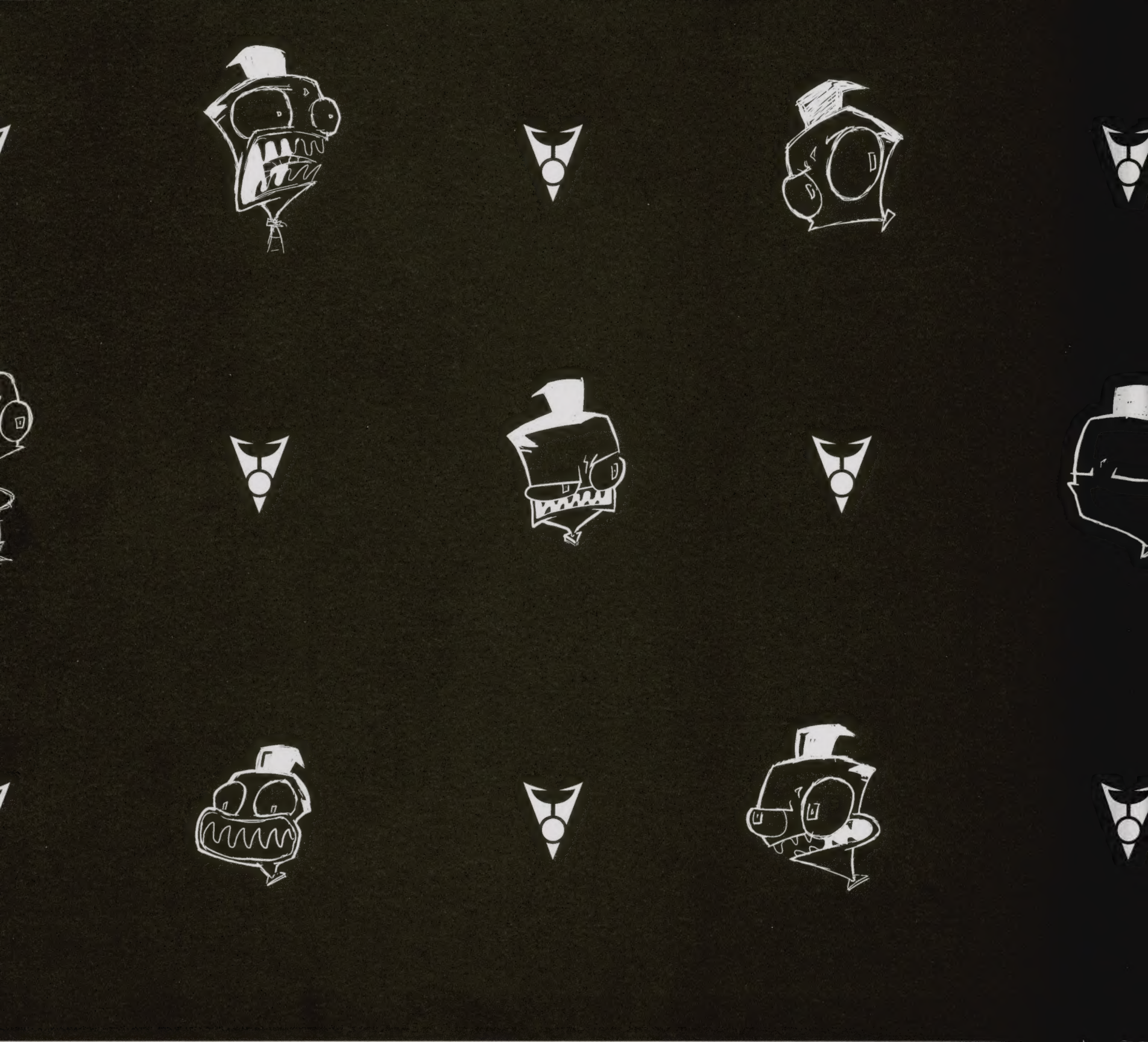

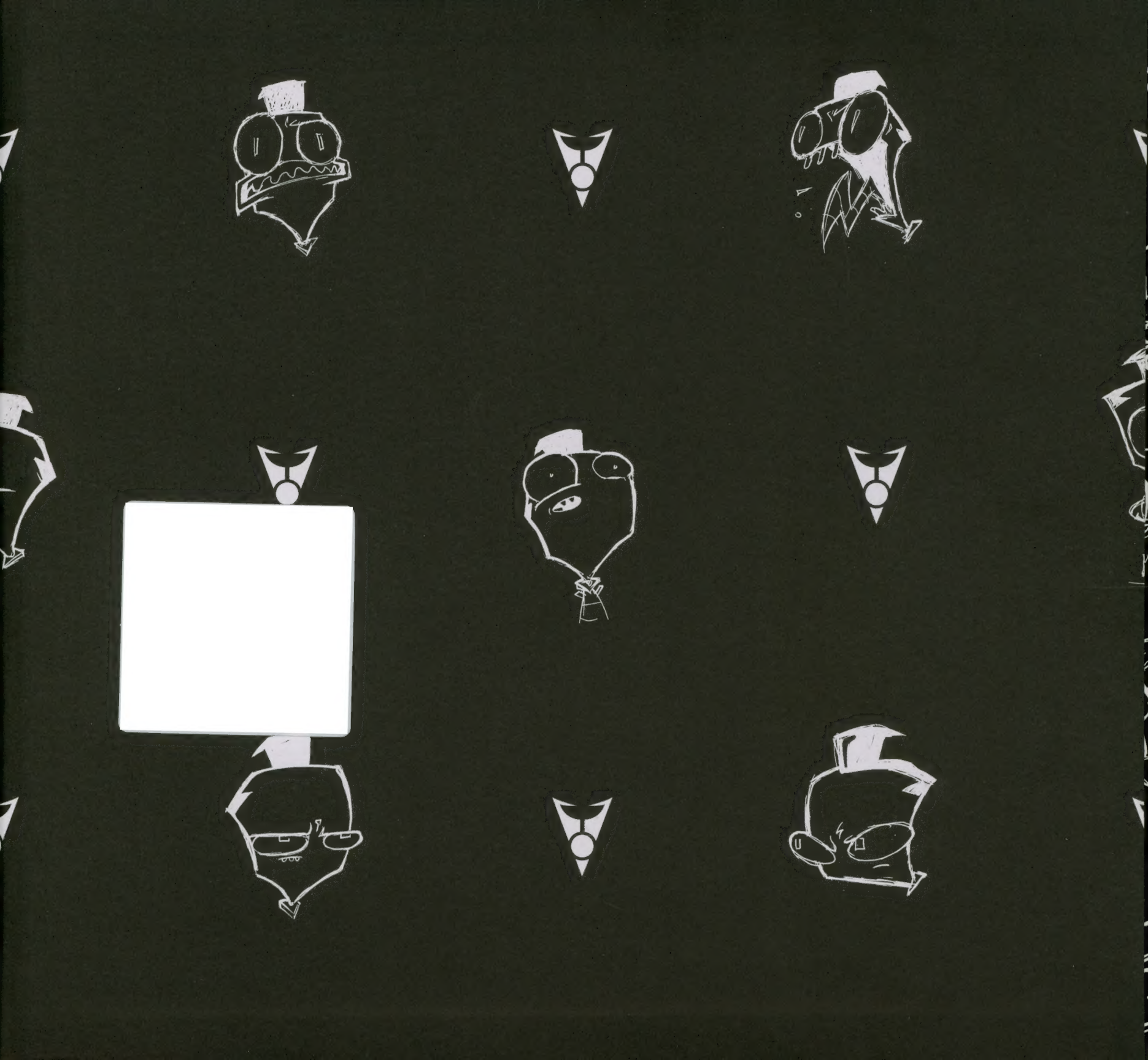

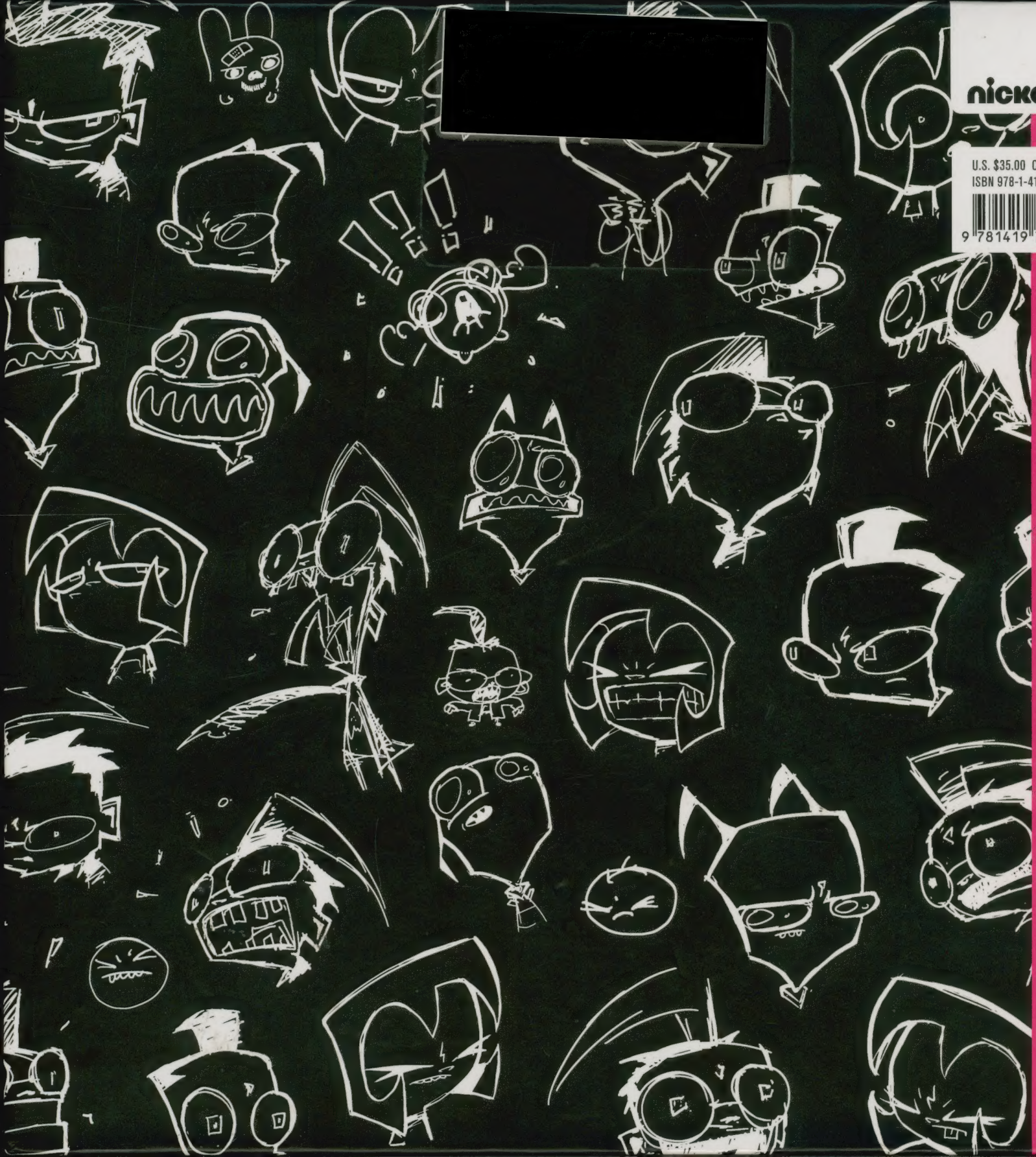

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